The Black Cat

L. May 1915. 1914-15

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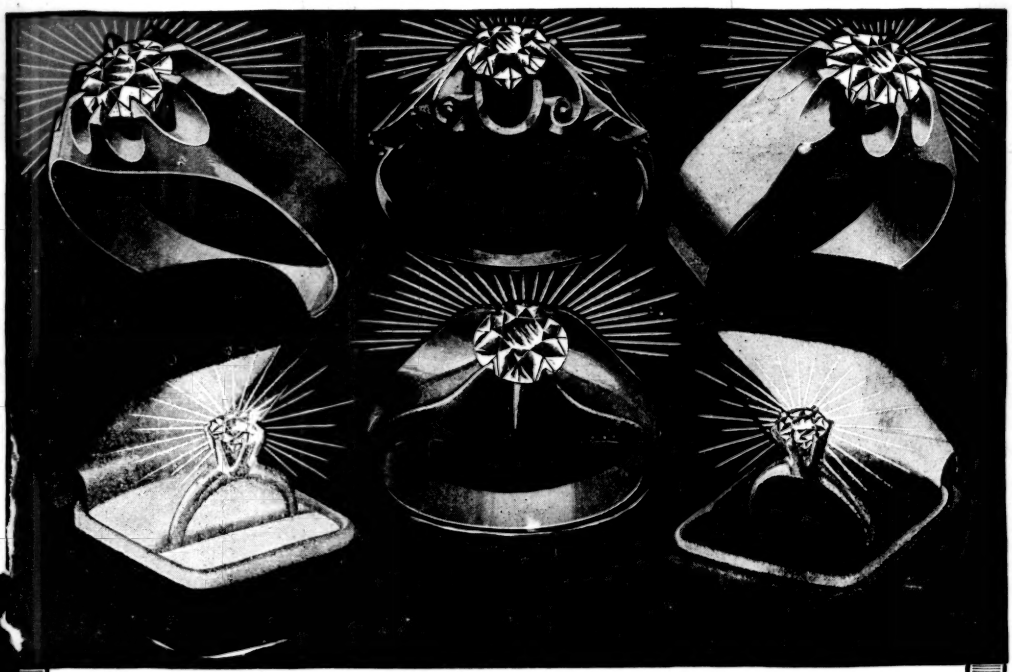

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The Black Cat

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Contents

The Cross of the White God By Harold de Polo *Page* 1
An American doctor travelling thro' Mexico is attacked and seized by an outlaw band. By the clever use of his professional knowledge he plays upon their superstitions and saves his money and his life.

The A. P. A. . . . By J. A. Tiffany *Page* 8
The Irish are fun lovers the world over. But here's a case where they were deadly in earnest—where their love of country killed their sense of humor—for a time.

The Humming Bats . By Wilder Anthony *Page* 11
In an orchid hunt thro' Borneo, two explorers have an adventure with Dyak head-hunters and the weird defenders of their holy places, which results in a terrible death for one of the party.

Crooked Cards . . . . By Ross Ellis *Page* 20
Here's a smashing story of the blood lust that ofttimes comes with gold, and two men who didn't "go home."

Two Burglars and a Cracksman By William K. Gibbs *Page* 27
Some one once said, "When Thieves fall out, then honest men get their due," but this is a case where the honest man did not profit by a professional mix-up.

The Moon on the Mesa By Brevard Mays Connor *Page* 31
A victim of the fury of the rebels in Mexico, an American, returns to his home after recovery from his wounds. He finds his native wife gone, and trails the Mexican who took her.

The Master Hand . . . By H. P. Holt *Page* 39
We are all familiar with the card sharpers who infest our great ocean liners, and if you ever have had experience with this gentry, you'll enjoy this yarn of the trimmers trimmed.

The Invention that Got Across . By Joshua Jordan *Page* 46
This is a story of a burglar alarm that didn't work, and of a bright youth whose brain was working all the time.

Luke McLuke . . By J. Syme Hastings *Page* 53
If you don't know Luke meet him now. He is a joy-maker.

Skeleton Gully's Gold . By Raymond Lee Hill *Page* 53
Two stake workers with an old family feud between them, find it hard to kill one another when it is to their material advantage as well as a sop to their ideas of honor to finish one another.

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The Black Cat

The Cross of the White God

BY HAROLD DE POLO

An American doctor travelling thro' Mexico is attacked and seized by an outlaw band. By the clever use of his professional knowledge he plays upon their superstition and saves his money and his life.

YOUNG Doctor Norden chafed at the slow progress he was making through the thick Campeche jungle. He had a horse under him capable of going at a fair gait, yet he was compelled to walk him over the narrow trail so that he might not become separated from his string of burros, so heavily laden with medicines and instruments, that they were jogging along at a snail's pace. And Norden, coming down to Mexico to take up his duties as physician to a large lumber ranch, had been told to hurry, for an epidemic of fever had struck the camp, and he must do his best to nip it in the bud.

In the excellent Spanish he had learned at college, he called out to one of the two *peons* who were guiding his pack animals: "How much further to San Isidro now, Juan?"

"Ah, my master, not much more than three leagues or so, thank the good *Dios* above! Truly, it is a day fit for the devil alone, eh?"

Norden sighed with relief to think that the journey was nearly over. As the *peon* had aptly remarked—it was surely a day fit for the devil only. The thermometer must have stood at a hundred and fifteen, and not a breath of air was stirring in the heavy, impenetrable growth of jungle, that even the sun failed to penetrate. To either side, so thick was the bush, one could barely look ahead for more than a dozen feet. It seemed, indeed, as if one were shut off from the whole world in this green, fertile oven of a forest; especially, too, when one was not used to the climate.

The American hummed a gay little tune at the prospect of his destination being so near, and undid the last button on his shirt, throwing it wide open at his neck and breast, and pulling the cloth from him where it literally stuck to his body. Yes, he certainly would be glad to get to San Isidro. He had been on the trail now, for a good forty-eight hours since he had left the small coast town of Laguna del Carmen. Also, he had been told to keep a sharp watch out for one Torbaso, a roving Maya Indian with a half score of followers, who plundered all travelers with whom they came in contact. And

Norden was on an important mission, for human lives hung on his stopping the fever and keeping it from spreading. A delay would be serious. So far, though, he had seen nothing of the bandit, and felt almost sure that he need have no fear. Probably reports as to the man's wholesale robberies, he told himself, were rather exaggerated.

But trouble is a fickle thing, that usually comes when least expected. Suddenly, from behind, he heard a rustling in the bush. Instantly he turned—just in time to see a dark-faced form break onto the trail, a leveled revolver in his hand.

"Up with your hands, *gringo,*" cried the man, in a Spanish dialect that told Norden he was undoubtedly one of the Maya bandits; while the American's two *peons,* on the instant, shrieked out their terror and raced madly away. But Norden's blood was red—all red. Instead of obeying the command, he flashed his hand to his hip, whipped out his own weapon, and shot straight for the aggressor before the other was aware what was happening. The Indian gave a shriek and toppled over like a log, his life gone out.

But before the man struck the earth, half a dozen more forms, headed by a tall giant of a brute, sprang out and faced the American.

"Shoot him down, men!" shrieked the leader, and reports rang out on the air almost before the words were finished.

Norden knew that he stood no chance of retreating, for the frightened burros completely blocked his trail. And so, knowing that he was fighting a practically hopeless fight, he blazed steadily away with his own gun as he squared his jaw.

The other bullets passed by him; at last, one of them struck his chest. He looked and saw that it had torn a hole through his shirt; but, by some miracle of Providence, it had come in contact with his large knife in the small breast pocket of his shirt and glanced off. Luck was certainly with him and he might yet win out. He extracted his other revolver, took careful aim, and had the satisfaction of hearing another Indian howl out his pain, and saw him drop his gun.

Then something happened on which he had not counted. Someone, from behind, struck him on the head with fearful force. He swayed, threw up his hands, and then toppled inertly to the ground, the world going black and blank before him.

When Norden regained consciousness he found himself inside a little thatch hut, his boxes and chests piled up around the walls. His feet were trussed up with a stout rope; his hands, too, were tied before him, but only at the wrists, so that they allowed him some freedom of movement. He looked slowly about and saw that no one was near. Then his eyes fell on a jug of water, and he crawled to it and drank feverishly. His first thought, after this, was of his knife, and he moved up his hands to get it; but it had undoubtedly slipped from his pocket when he fell. He searched the room for it, hoping it might be there, but it proved futile. Anyway, it had saved his life for the time being when it had stopped

the Mexican's bullet from entering his heart.

Then he realized that perhaps it would have been better had it not been so. He would have died a clean death, fighting for his life. Now, without doubt, he would be killed ignominiously—perhaps tortured, especially when he remembered that he had ended an outlaw's life with his first shot. Yes, he saw before him a hard death, without the single chance of a tussle for his liberty. He bit his lips and creased his forehead, thinking of some way whereby he might possibly regain his freedom.

No matter what people had said upon the subject, he told himself, it was a difficult ordeal to stare death in the face in this hopeless, cruel manner. He was young, strong, in the very prime of his life, with all the world before him—and yet he must leave it without a murmur. God, but it was hard! Then anger took hold of him. With all the power of his sinewy, muscular arms, he tried his mightiest to break the bonds that held him. But the man whose rushes on the gridiron while at college had been famed over the whole country, could do nothing at all with the tough rope that manacled his hands and feet. No, at last, he admitted, that in this case sheer brute strength was of no avail.

He looked hungrily out of the little window on he right side of the hut, and there, in the soft rose-blue, tropical sky, he saw the great huge ball of fiery sun slowly descending toward the horizon. How warm and soft and pleasant the world looked! Why, judging from the position of the sun, he must have been unconscious some four or five hours, for it had been close to noonday when he had been struck down. Then he thought of the ranch—thought of the people there, probably awaiting his arrival anxiously, hoping in their hearts that the man who might stop the fever would come. Heaven help them! for it would be some time before they learned of his capture and could send for another man. Yes, heaven help them—and him!

But no, there must be some way—some one way—that would yet save him from this death. There must—there must! He bowed his head and thought—thought as man does in his position—thought so that it seemed as if his very thoughts hurt his throbbing, whirling brain. He was thinking also against time, for if there was any way of escape it must be done quickly. Soon they would come for him—probably now it was but a matter of minutes. He had heard much of the quickness with which Torbaso dealt out his vengeance. Yes, he must think—think, think, think!

At least ten long, dreary minutes must have gone by before Norden threw back his head, his eyes snapping, his lips turned in a shrewd smile. He scanned his boxes and leather cases carefully, his eyes finally centering on a small black bag thrown upon the ground. Working his hands to his side, he reached into his trousers pocket and took out his bunch of keys. Thank God, the Indians had not taken them! He ran his fingers over them rapidly, selected one, and fitted it into the keyhole of the leather

satchel. With a click it was open. He rummaged through its contents like lightning, finally pouncing upon a small bottle and bringing it out, with joy on his face. Here, possibly, was his one and only hope. Then he carefully closed the satchel, locked it, and returned the keys to his pocket.

Uncorking the bottle with his teeth, he crawled over to the earthern jug of water that had been placed in the room and emptied the entire contents of the bottle into it, after which he was careful to throw the vial behind his boxes, quite safely out of sight. Then he managed to get to the other end of the room, seat himself composedly and call out in a loud, commanding voice, for someone to come to him.

In a moment, the narrow door was cautiously opened, a black-topped head was thrust in; still blacker eyes looked carefully about the room; and then, seeing that all was safe, the man entered, a rifle in his hand. He cocked his head arrogantly.

"Well, dog of a *gringo,* what is it, eh?"

Norden never moved a muscle. He eyed the man with a stern, rebuking glance. "Call thy master," he said, his voice cold.

"*Caramba,* but the white pig is brave, eh?" laughed the Maya with a mocking sneer.

The American drilled the man through with his eyes: "Call thy master," he repeated.

The Indian clutched his weapon; then, thinking better of it, he nodded his head, and his eyes twinkled cun ningly: "I will, *gringo* dirt!" he chuckled. "Ho, ho! but it will be good fun to see you speak so to *him*—to Torbaso. Ha, ha, ha!" And he went off laughing.

Norden wet his lips and squared his jaw, preparing for his one fighting chance.

After several minutes, the bandit chief entered, his huge, powerful figure looming up in the little hut like some monstrous giant. He put his arms akimbo, eyed his captive with his cruel, tricky orbs, and turned his lips in taunting scorn. The followers behind him winked at one another, at the amusement they expected to have.

"Well," rumbled the Maya, "and what does the beast of a filthy *Americano* want?"

Norden eyed the famous Torbaso with the same stern, rebuking look that he had used on his follower. "Torbaso," he said, gravely, "I believe that the time has come when I must teach thee thy lesson," and he nodded his head as one who had decided after having given much thought to the subject.

The Indian, for a brief moment, started back and looked perplexed. Then he threw back his head and laughed. "Ha, ha, ha! So the snake of an *Americano* would make sport of Torbaso—*of Torbaso, eh?*" He lowered his head and walked menacingly forward, his great fist clenched and raised, his eyes smoldering.

Young Doctor Norden did not move the fraction of an inch; neither did he blink an eyelash. His face grew sterner, his head went higher, and he spoke in a loud voice that had in it just a trace of anger. "Be careful, *hombre!* Thou playest with fire and things thou know not of!"

This answer, somehow, caused Torbaso to hesitate. He blinked his eyes, and regarded his captive with a curious glance, his innate sense of things mysterious and superstitious getting the better of him for the moment. His men, seeing their master so impressed, refrained from laughter, and looked on with wide, serious eyes.

Norden saw that his first card had been a telling one, and he instantly followed it up with a second. His voice was quiet, slow, sombre—sombre almost to a point of uncanniness—and his face still wore the same grave, calm expression.

"Listen, black sinner—listen, and thou shalt learn good things! Firstly, see thou this hole in my shirt, directly over my heart? See, it is where one of thy bullets struck me! But look, I have said that it is right over the heart, and yet dost thou see any blood? Am I not alive and well?" And he struck his breast with his palm, finding it hard not to wince at the pain he inflicted on the bruise.

The bandit chief leaned eagerly forward. He looked searchingly at the hole in the shirt. There was not a drop of blood—not a drop. His mouth gaped, his eyes went wide, and he fell back gasping. His men, behind him, whispered to one another something about the devil himself. One of them even crossed himself.

Before the impression could grow cold, Norden continued: "It is well. Thou seest I am not harmed by lead. Excellent. Torbaso, I have put myself in thy power for one reason alone: simply so that I might prove to thee who I am and that I mean what I say! If I wished, I might break these bonds in an instant. But no; first I wish to teach thee thy lesson. It came to my ears, far away in my own country, that thou ravaged the land with thy thirst for gold—for gold and for blood! Of this land I have nothing to say—it is not my affair! But it came to my ears that thou didst once or twice take the life of a white man—*of a white man!*"

Norden paused a moment, allowing his words just time to sink in.

The famed bandit chief had slowly edged away, his swarthy face suddenly growing sallow. Here was a man who could withstand lead. He knew not what it meant except that he must necessarily be some unearthly creature. What—who—was he?

Again the young American spoke; this time raising his voice in anger and allowing an expression of rage to creep over his face. "Yes, thou black fiend, it came to my ears that thou hast taken the blood of my white children—*of my children, who art their God!* But then, I am a just God; I do not ask blood for blood! It is not the white way! What I ask is that thou refrain, forevermore, from touching any of my children! Refrain, black cur, or I will visit destruction on thyself and on thy entire race! And now, Torbaso, sever the bonds that hold me, pack my things for me, and I will proceed on my journey! Remember, though—remember thy lesson!"

For a long, long minute there was utter silence in the little hut. The Indian, all his superstitions fighting within his breast, stood as one in a

trance, gazing at his captive with dazed, fixed eyes. His companions, in back, had drawn off into a corner, and were looking furtively at the two principal figures, thoroughly believing anything of this white being who could withstand lead.

Presently the Maya chief threw off the spell that held him and burst into a loud laugh,—yet it was not his usual rolling, confident one. "Ha, ha, ha! *Gringo* dog that thou art, wouldst thou have me believe that—"

But he got no further. Norden realized that the big, supreme moment was at hand, and with an effort got to his feet. He stretched out his manacled hands and pointed accusingly at the towering form. His eyes blazed his rage, and his voice pealed out like thunder in the small hut.

"Fool, *fool!*" he cried, "I told thee that I was a gentle God—a God who cared not for blood for blood. Be careful, earthly sinner—be careful! If I see my word doubted, I may become an angry God—become an angry God and strike thee dead where thou stand! But no, I am a gentle God, and will give thee one more chance!"

He paused and glanced about the room, while the bandit followed his gaze with bewildered eyes. Finally, Norden's eyes, as if by chance, lit upon the water jug. "It is well," he said. Listen; place the two fingers of thy right hand, into the mouth of the jug; draw a cross upon thy forehead; and then thou shalt behold the red, burning cross of the white God! Then thou shalt see what I am! Remember, though," he added, "thou must remember thy lesson and harm no more of my children—'tis with that promise alone that I give thee thy life! Now, thou whom they call Torbaso, do as thou hast been bidden!"

Torbaso, superstition entirely dominant in his brain at the words of this being who could withstand lead, did as he had been told, while his men eyed him with frightened glances.

Very slowly, after a moment had gone by, the dull, faint outline of a cross began to show upon his forehead. And in a moment more, it was suddenly a red, flaming mark, that caused his followers to cry out at the top of their lungs for mercy: "Mercy, mercy, mercy!" The white God was among them, and would kill them all!

Norden raised his hands high and spoke in a sepulchral voice. "Burn, my cross—burn!"

The bandit's face had gone as white as it is possible for a Maya's skin to go, and he stood looking at his men, his body trembling, his features terror-stricken. He felt a smarting burn on his forehead and remembered the white being's words. After a moment, he found his voice.

"Ba—Basilio," he gasped. "Go—cr—cross thyself—cross thyself!"

The man whimpered and cringed away.

Dully, it came to Torbaso that he was still chief of his men. "Cross thyself!" he shrieked, and his hand flew to his *machete*.

The man ambled forward, shaking like a leaf. He closed his eyes, stuck his finger into the jug, and drew it over his forehead in the form of a cross.

Norden watched the proceeding with a beating heart but with an im-

mobile face. Torbaso watched it with bulging eyes, his breath held in, his body quite rigid.

Slowly—very slowly—a slight redness began to appear upon the dark forehead.

Norden then cut in with his former words: "Burn, my cross—burn!"

And then, as in Torbaso's case, the cross suddenly flamed out into a deep red—the red cross of the white God—and the man's hand flew to his forehead at the smart of the burn.

Then Torbaso went to pieces. *"Madre de Dios,"* he shrieked, flinging up his arms and rushing from the hut. "Juan—Paulo—Blasco—Tomasco! Come—come quick—come quick and free the white God! Quick, I say—quick! Free him—give him back his burros and boxes—let him go on his way! Give him all—give him anything—anything, anything, anything! Quick—quick! Come and free the white God! Come, come, come! *Madre de Dios!* Come, come, come! Come before the white God becomes angry and slays us all—come!"

And, rushing about the camp like a madman, he flung his orders here and there, intent only on ridding himself of the presence of the white God who might at any moment lose his temper and bring death upon them all.

So it was that Norden, in a very short time, was once more safely on his way to the ranch, his string of burros, securely laden, moving quietly and slowly on ahead of him.

That is why, if you ask Doctor Norden what he considers to be the most useful medicine, he will throw back his head, laugh quite heartily, and tell you that it is muriatic acid. Then, if you inquire further, he will recount the tale you have just read.

The A. P. A.

BY J. A. TIFFANY

The Irish are fun lovers the world over. But here's a case where they were deadly in earnest—where their love of country killed their sense of humor—for a time.

ES, sir," said Mr. Terrence Finnegan, proprietor of the Castle Hotel, as he nodded approvingly at the *Pioneer* office across the street; "it's as fine a building as there is in the Middle West; and there isn't a whiter man than the owner and editor of the *Pioneer* anywhere north of the Equator.

"He came here, fresh from an eastern college, twenty-five years ago, when there wasn't more than a hundred shacks in the place, nor any city within three hundred miles. But he saw the possibilities of the place; and with a light heart and a lighter purse he went to work and started the *Pioneer*.

"We were mostly Irish, and Mr. Lonsdale wasn't one of our kind; but we took to him from the start, and every man in town used to buy his paper as soon as it came out—a little bit of a four-page sheet, printed on a hand press, and sold at ten cents a copy.

"Maybe, he got ten dollars a week for advertising—local and foreign; and with his circulation, that gave him an income of twenty dollars, out of which he had to live and pay all the expenses of his paper.

"But he had a little money when he came, and things seemed to be going all right until one night, when the *Pioneer* was two months old, the plant burned down, and Lonsdale was left without office, home or money.

"Next day, a few of us got together and started a canvass of the town. We raised four hundred dollars in eighty annual subscriptions of five dollars apiece, and gave the money to Lonsdale to make a fresh start.

" 'If it isn't enough, sir, we'll pay two years in advance, and make it eight hundred dollars,' says Mike Dolan, now owner of the Grand Opera House, but at that time drayman in the freight yard of the new railroad.

" 'God bless you, boys,' says Lonsdale, with tears streaming down his cheeks; 'it's more than I had to start with—more than I need. You've made me rich. I shall never forget your kindness.'

"And he never has, sir. He's a millionaire, now; he's our Representative in Congress, and next year we intend to elect him Governor of the state; but he's just as modest and simple and natural as he was that day when we clubbed together to put him on his feet.

"It took a month or more to build a new cabin, install a press, get type and other supplies; but by that time the *Pioneer* got started again, our

population had increased, and Lonsdale had new subscribers and fresh advertisers to furnish him weekly revenue. Still, many of the boys used to buy the paper on the streets, just as if it wasn't being left at their shacks on account of their advance subscription.

"I guess it was about three months after the re-appearance of the *Pioneer* that Dolan drove up to my saloon one morning. He poked his head in at the swinging doors and beckoned to me in a mysterious sort of a way.

"I went out and found Mike leaning heavily against his wagon, looking pale.

"'What's the matter, Dolan?' I asked.

"Throwing aside a piece of burlap, he showed me a package and pointed to some printing in the upper left-hand corner of the label.

"I'm not any scholar, and at that time I couldn't read; but I knew enough to make out three letters in big black type.

"'Phew! Who's it for?' I asked.

"'Guess,' says Mike, who couldn't read any more than I could.

"'I can't guess; but tell me the fellow's name and I'll smash the face of him,' I says.

"'No,' says Mike; 'this thing isn't to be settled that way. This is a matter for the citizens' committee. We must call a meeting.'

"'But who is it for?' I asked again.

"'It's for that two-faced, ungrateful, hypocritical tenderfoot, Jim Lonsdale—the biggest traitor that ever was, since the days of Judas Iscariot.'

"'Jim Lonsdale!' I gasped.

"'That's who. Now, I'll go around among the boys, and we'll have a meeting in our big room at ten o'clock tonight."

"'What are you going to do with the package?'

"'Do with it? I'm going to dump it in the creek.'

"'Good for you!'

"At ten o'clock that night, every Irishman in town—about eighty-five of them—crowded into my big room; and, as chairman of the meeting, I told them what I'd seen in Dolan's wagon and called upon Mike to state the name of the consignee.

"'It was for Jim Lonsdale,' says Dolan.

"We went into executive session and in less than five minutes pronounced sentence on the editor of the *Pioneer*.

"Just as we were starting out for his place, Lonsdale came in. Four of our men grabbed him, stuffed a gag in his mouth, tied him up with ropes and locked him in the back room.

"Then we went to the newspaper office with hammers, axes and crowbars. We broke open the door, smashed the press and the furniture, kicked the cases of type off the frames, and set fire to the place.

"The blaze brought out all the rest of the town—men, women and children; and the poor kids, who had been in the habit of reading Lonsdale's paragraphs and editorials to us ignorant elders, were greatly distressed at the destruction of the plant.

"In less than half-an-hour, it was reduced to ashes, the thick, gummy printer's ink helping on the work in great style.

"Leaving the smoldering ruins, we went back to the Keg and Bottle—my saloon—and proceeded to the rear room where Lonsdale lay, white and helpless, a dazed, wondering look on his face.

"We put him on his feet, untied the cords and took the gag out of his mouth.

" 'Now,' says Dolan, who, by right of his discovery of Lonsdale's treason, acted as prosecutor and spokesman, 'there's a freight goes East in fifteen minutes. You better jump her, and don't ever show your face again in New Limerick'—the original name of this flourishing city of Gloucester, sir.

" 'But what have I done, boys, that everyone turns so suddenly against me?' Lonsdale asked.

" 'Done!' says Mike. 'Haven't we used you white? Haven't we treated you as one of ourselves? Have we ever held it up against you that you was a heretic? And haven't you pretended to be broad-minded and free from bigotry?'

" 'I hope I am all of that.'

" 'Hope you're all of that, and you in league with the A.P.A.'s, you miserable traitor!' Mike thundered.

" 'In league with the A.P.A.'s? I don't know what you mean.'

" 'Why, wasn't it only this morning that I had a package for you handed me by the freight agent?—and there up in a corner wasn't the address of the sender, with the name in great big black type, bold as brass? I couldn't make out the whole of the words, but Terry Finnegan saw it, too, and he'll bear me out that the first letters was A.P.A.' "

" 'Oh, oh! This is too funny for anything!' Lonsdale yelled, and rolled on a table, laughing.

" 'Come on, now,' says Dolan. 'You have only ten minutes to make that freight.'

" 'But, boys, listen: those letters, A.P.A. stand for the American Press Association—a syndicate that I've just started buying boiler plate from—news articles and stories, already set in type and stereotyped. Here's Mr. Williams,' says Lonsdale, as the freight agent appeared in the doorway. 'Will you tell the boys where that package was from that you had for me this morning?'

" 'From the American Press Association,' says Williams.

" 'Well, I'll be danged,' says Dolan. 'Kick me, Mr. Lonsdale—kick me good and hard! Well, Finnegan, if he won't—and just the same if he will—the treat's on me. Set 'em up all around; and I'm going to start a subscription to make up Mr. Lonsdale's loss. I'll head it with twenty-five dollars.'

" 'Another twenty-five for me,' says I; and in ten minutes, or less time than it had taken to wreck and burn the *Pioneer* plant, we had raised nine hundred dollars to build it up again.

"I guess it's true, as some man said, that 'a little learning is a dangerous thing.' Neither Mike nor I had ever learned more than the alphabet; and if we hadn't known that, we should have saved ourselves and Jim Lonsdale a lot of trouble."

The Humming Bats

BY WILDER ANTHONY

In an orchid hunt thro' Borneo, two explorers have an adventure with Dyak head-hunters, and the weird defenders of their holy places which results in a terrible death for one of the party.

DOCTOR MORGARIDGE ducked suddenly and threw up his arm in a posture of defense. The movement was so quick, so unexpected, coming while we were seated in front of Rodney's, sipping our juleps and enjoying the faint breeze that came out of the canyon, that it startled us all. It was uncalled for, too, so far as we could see. There was nothing unusual in sight, and save for the loud buzz of a great black hornet, which passed over us like a rifle bullet, not a sound had broken the stillness for several minutes.

With the half-apologetic smile of one caught in something foolish, the doctor settled himself in his chair again. No one said anything. There was nothing to say. Men—even strong men like our friend—sometimes possess nerves, and all of us assembled there that day had seen enough of the other side of life to know it.

A long pull at his julep—such a julep as Rodney alone can build—steadied Morgaridge somewhat. The color came back into his lean cheeks, and he lit a fresh cigar.

"Your pardon, gentlemen," he begged, in his deep, soft voice, "I forgot myself. That hornet's buzzing pricked an unhealed wound. One sometimes has memories, you know. This was one of them."

He paused and fussed with his glass as though nothing further could be said; but Werner would not let it drop.

"Why not spin the yarn, Doc?" he asked, in the freedom of a long friendship. "We all know there *is* a yarn, when a man like you dodges a buzzing insect. It must be interesting, and we have nothing at all to do but talk. Tell us about it, like a good chap, unless, of course, the subject is too unpleasant."

The explorer and orchid hunter smiled—one of those slow, rippling smiles, that made him friends in all corners of the world.

"The subject," he said quietly, "is unpleasant—very; but it might do me good to speak of it to some one who would believe as I think you might. You all knew him once, and it may be that you can credit what even I, although I saw it, often look back upon as a horrible dream. You remember Billy Prentiss?"

We all nodded. Until about two years before, Prentiss had been one of us. A homeless wandering adventurer, now here, now there, always in search of excitement and whatever else might lie at the end of a trail.

Then he had disappeared, and none of us had heard of him in months.

"My story," Doctor Morgaridge went on, "has to do with him and his last great adventure. It is the last word from a brave man whose greatest weakness was the *wanderlust*. The tale will sound incredible to you who have not seen; but it is true—absolutely. I can see it all now even more clearly, perhaps, than I could at the time it happened.

"Three years ago, Billy Prentiss and I joined forces in an orchid hunt that took us far into the interior of Borneo. We were after the Maxler Orchid—you've heard of it, maybe, that exceedingly rare and beautiful plant in the discovery of which Sir James Maxler gave up his life. Only two perfect specimens of it have ever been brought to civilization, although more than one good man lost his life in the effort.

"Maxler's discovery was made somewhere in the vicinity of Kini-Balu, and early in October of the year nineteen hundred and nine, we—Prentiss and I—entered this region. Like a great part of Borneo, it is a wild, desolate, unhealthy country, peopled by head-hunters and cannibals, and fairly overrun by snakes and other poisonous vermin.

"For six weeks we met with little success. Orchids grew everywhere, but the one we sought was not among them. We had a good outfit. Three gobangs—the canoe of the Dyaks—with six men in each as a crew. They were Coast Dyaks from near Taban, brown-skinned and small, but mighty well-built and resolute. Like all of their race, they went practically naked, clad only in loin-cloth and all kinds of grotesque ornaments, most of which were suspended from the ears or nose. They were deadly enemies of the head-hunters, who inhabited the country through which we were travelling.

"One day, owing to a slight leak in Prentiss's canoe, we decided to go ashore early and camp. It was mid-afternoon and half dark, as it always is in the jungle, when we struck a sort of clearing on the bank of the slow-moving, muddy stream we traveled. Swishing and snapping through the rank lush-grass and ferns that fringed the river, we finally reached the bank and disembarked, much to the anger and fear of a large band of monkeys, which began a chattering flight through the treetops at our approach. At one side of the little park there was a huge flat rock—a fine place for a bed in that country, where, as a rule, the ground is nothing more than a putrid mass of rotten vegetation, and Prentiss and I took immediate possession of it.

"The gobang had been repaired, and we were enjoying a smoke while our men cooked supper, when we were startled by a commotion in the jungle behind us. There was a snapping of dry vines and a swaying of the tall grass; and then something rolled or bounded into the comparative open of our clearing. By this time, we were both on our feet, weapons in hand, for in that region one cannot afford to take chances, when Prentiss let out a shout.

"'My God!' he cried in amazement. 'It's a man.'

"He was right. The rolling, misshapen thing on the ground, which, at first, we had taken for some unknown kind of beast, was a white man, although I hope it may never again be my fortune to look upon such a face as the creature turned towards us. It was ghastly—it wasn't human—it was . . . Well, it made me sick at my stomach when I saw it, and I'm not naturally a squeamish man.

"The man's lips, nose, and ears were gone—eaten out by the roots, you might say, with nothing left in their places but raw meat. His face, by reason of his teeth being constantly exposed, seemed set in a perpetual and indescribably horrible grin, and his entire head was covered with dried blood and flies! It was awful, I tell you.

"For a few seconds, Billy and I gazed at this apparition in dumb horror, while our Dyaks—superstitious little beggars, in spite of their courage—huddled around our rock and jabbered at each other like monkeys. Then, coming to ourselves with a jerk, we sprang to the stranger's assistance. Between us—the Dyaks wouldn't touch him at first—we got him into the tent and on to some blankets, where he collapsed like a pricked bubble.

"At first we thought he had gone for good, but a liberal dose of brandy revived him, and by the time we had finished a hurried dressing of his horrible wounds he was able to sit up. From the beginning, however, we knew that the man had not long to live. Indeed, it was wonderful that he had kept alive so long in his terribly mutilated state. It was only by an almost superhuman drain on his extraordinary vitality that he kept alive long enough to tell his story.

"His name, he said, was Conroy—Walter Conroy; he was English, and he had not been outside Borneo for ten years. Two months before, while on an ivory hunt, he had been captured by head-hunters and subjected to tortures too horrible to relate. These tortures culminated in the most fiendish act mortal man ever heard of—it was a masterstroke in cruelty even for the head-hunters, which is making it pretty strong.

"About ten days before we found him, as nearly as he could judge,—the poor devil had lost all sense of reckoning,—Conroy had been shut up in a cave in the side of the mountain, which, he thought, could not be more than four days' travel from our camp. It was a sacrificial temple of the head-hunters; one wing of it was given over to the priests and their horrible orgies, and the other occupied by the heads of their victims and—

"This last, gentlemen, is almost beyond my power to tell; it is too awful to contemplate; that poor devil, already racked by torture of the most terrible kind, thrust into that evil-smelling hole with—but I'll try to give you the rest of the story as nearly as possible in his own words. The mental picture of that night will always be with me. The dark, stinking swamp, filled with its myriads of reptilian life that surrounded us, the solemn Dyaks sitting motionless as images around our rock, the little tent with its open flaps, lighted by a single

torch, and that awful wreck of a thing, once a man, lying on a pile of blankets in its center. Prentiss and I crouched on either side of him, listening to his jerky, feverish words, and keeping up the faint spark of life inside of him by every means at our command.

"'They thrust me into the cave,' he gasped, the words coming horribly from his mutilated lips, 'a big cave—God knows how big—filled with drying heads, stinking terribly, and guarded by those black monkey-devils—the priests. At first, after they turned me loose, I was too weak to look around much; I fell in the nasty filth that was at the bottom of the hole, and lay still. Then—I don't know how much later—I sat up and looked around. It was dark—dark as hell; but I was used to darkness by that time, and my eyes made out a part of the big chamber that held me.

"'It was mostly solid rock—walls and roof—with a narrow opening at one side that led into the priests' room; I could see 'em moving about their fire. A terrible stench filled the place, which, I soon discovered, came from hundreds of partly decomposed heads and bodies that festooned the cave on all sides. It was a fearful sight—those skulls grinning at me every way I turned—and to escape them and the smell, I went further back into the chamber. Here it was higher and dry, and pretty soon I came to a pile of what I thought at first was stones.

"'It wasn't, though. That pile was made of human skulls and bones—hundreds of 'em—and then I saw it: gold, gentlemen, gold! piles of it, pure virgin metal, red as the blood it had probably been drenched with, and half-covered with skulls. For a little, weak as I was, the sight staggered me. I forgot everything—the savages, the priests, my own danger—all but the fact that I was gazing at a king's fortune. God knows where it came from; but it's there—heaps and heaps and piles of it!'

"The dying man stopped here, and for a moment we thought he was gone, but the brandy worked once more, and after a little, he revived. Half delirious, Conroy was going off into a wild ramble about hairy creatures with yellow eyes that were chasing him, when Prentiss seized him by the arm.

"'The treasure, man!' he hissed, voicing the thought uppermost in both our minds. 'The treasure—the gold—where is it?'

"'In the cave,' Conroy gurgled, 'the cave with the ladder entrance in the big rock. It's there—piles of it; but the bats, man,—the bats! My God, the humming bats! In my face—they buzz—they bite—they. . . My God, they're eating . . .'

"At last his voice rose to a terrible scream. He struggled convulsively a few seconds, choked, and fell back dead.

"Prentiss and I looked at each other across the body. Neither of us spoke then, I think. We just looked, reading each other's thoughts like a printed page; then Billy pulled his pipe from his pocket and stepped out of the tent. I followed him.

"Outside it was dark, black as the pit, a typical jungle night. The air, laden with dew, felt like a wet blanket

against our faces as we stood there smoking. Save for the occasional splash of a crocodile in the river, there wasn't a sound of any kind.

"'M o r g a r i d g e,' Prentiss said quietly, at length, 'I'm going after it. Are you game?'

"I did not reply at once. Even then I had misgivings, the raving of a dying man and all that, but the lure of the gold proved too strong in the end, just as Billy knew it would.

"'Yes,' I answered.

"At daylight, the next morning, we buried what was left of Conroy as decently as we could, packed the canoes and pushed out onto the river. Prentiss had been in that country before; he knew it better than I, and he thought that he could find the cave. Like all places of the kind, we reasoned that it would be removed at some little distance from the head-hunters' village, and we felt that we could surprise the priests—there wouldn't be more than half a dozen at most—and walk off with part of the treasure before the tribe discovered us. It was risky, of course; we might find ourselves in a fight with savages at any minute; but we were used to that; we were well-armed and our Dyaks were faithful. At the time, we practically forgot the Englishman's ravings about the bats.

"We did not go far that day. Coming to a good landing place, we beached and hid the canoes, and set out through the jungle in the direction of the mountain that Conroy had mentioned. Silent and determined, we left the gobangs beneath their screen of ferns and lianas, and started up a game trail scoured by the rains and feet of ages. We were in the jungle and the jungle-gloom was on us all.

"It was here that the real hardship and trouble began. Plodding in single file through ankle-deep mud, brushed shoulder high by rank weeds and grass, fighting poisonous insects and sweating like stokers, we made our way from the river to a little plateau where we pitched camp.

"In response to an order from Prentiss, one of our Dyaks began to climb a tall tree in an attempt to locate the head-hunters' village. The little brown man had gone about half way up when a thing like a green spear—a great rock snake—suddenly shot out from its lair behind some vines and struck him on the hip. He screamed in terror and fell headlong to the ground. After writhing in agony for a few minutes, he died.

"Next morning, when we gave orders to break camp, our Dyaks balked. They were afraid, they said; the mountain was taboo, the home of an evil spirit. Although we stormed and swore, and finally fell to pleading, they refused to accompany us farther. They promised to wait, however, until we returned, so with this assurance we loaded ourselves with duffle and set forth alone.

"By this time, I think, we were both treasure mad. We dwelt in that cursed jungle so long that we'd lost the power to reason as sane men should, and we pushed on in grim determination to find the gold or perish. We did not forget to be cautious, however. Certain signs in the runway we traveled told us that we were nearing a village; at any moment we might

meet a band of hunters or feel the sting of a poisoned dart in our ribs and we stole through the shadows, rifles at trail, like a pair of Apache warriors. The deep, stinking mud helped us to be quiet, although it impeded progress terribly.

"Mid-afternoon found us on somewhat higher and firmer ground. We were stealing through a clump of tall ferns, when Prentiss, who was ahead, raised his hand warningly. I crept forward and peered over his shoulder.

"Fifteen yards ahead, in a cleared space, crouched on his hams, sat a naked savage behind a small fire. His long black hair was matted and whitened with ashes, and he was scowling like an imp from Hades. His body was streaked and ornamented with wood juices and charcoal, and his long sumpitan, or blow-gun, lay by his side.

"For a little, we stared in silence; then Prentiss began to whisper.

" 'It's a Kapoeas,' he said. 'He's on a lone war-trail after his wedding head, I think. The young men among 'em can't marry, you know, till they've presented the bride-elect with the head of an enemy. We need a guide—let's get him alive."

"We separated, and crawling on our stomachs in the tall growth, moved around the little clearing in opposite directions. We wanted to get at hand-grips with our quarry before he had a chance to use his deadly weapon. One prick of those bari-tipped darts is sure death, you know. Keen as were the head-hunter's ears, he did not hear us until too late; before he could use his blow-gun, we had him pinned helpless. Then we tied him securely and stepped back, while Prentiss began to volley questions in the fellow's own jargon.

"At first, he was sullen and wouldn't answer. Merely stared at us in amazed fright. Finally, however, he opened up and he and Billy talked for some time. Just what they said, I don't know—I never learned more than a smattering of Dyak; but the upshot of it was that the Kapoeas agreed to guide us to the temple.

"Somewhat against my will, Prentiss freed our prisoner's feet and let him stand up. Then he fastened a stout withe to his pinioned arms and motioned him ahead of us. Without a murmur, the head-hunter walked off and we followed him up the rotting trail.

"It grew steeper and steeper. Many times we were forced to rest, although our guide seemed tireless. About an hour after the steamy night had fallen, we arrived at the bottom of a great cliff, which reached up out of sight into the darkness. Here, Prentiss and the Dyak had a long powwow, while I busied myself in winding rags about my feet, which were cut and bleeding from contact with the razor-edged grass.

"Prentiss finally turned to me.

" 'We're there, Morgaridge,' he began abruptly. 'At least, so the nigger says, and I don't think he lies. Around the corner of this cliff we'll find a ladder that will lead us to the cave. There's only four priests and we can handle 'em all right if we surprise 'em. I'm going to truss our nigger up to a tree; then we'll tackle it.'

"I nodded assent, for in spite of my hurt feet, I was as keen and eager as he to view the gold. Our falling in with the Kapoeas had saved us a lot of time, and if we could surprise the priests without being ourselves surprised by a horde of savages, the thing looked fairly simple. We tied up the guide and started for the ladder, which we found easily enough.

"It was a long, narrow, flimsy contraption of poles, slippery with dew and set nearly perpendicular against the rock. After an instant's hesitation, we started to climb, Prentiss leading, I close at his heels.

"It was an eerie job. All the way up—it seemed miles, although I don't suppose we ascended over a hundred feet—I kept wondering what would happen if our prisoner got loose and warned his friends, or if the priests heard us and met us at the top. Cramped as we were on that narrow ladder with its slimy rungs and treacherous handholds, a child might have sent us into eternity with a single shove. Luck seemed with us, however. Without mishap we reached a kind of shelf in the cliff and pulled ourselves over its edge, where we lay at full length, panting and regaining our strength.

"Here we talked a little in whispers, and decided that if we should overpower the priests and find the treasure, we would drop as much of it as we could over the ledge. Afterwards, we could descend and pack it away to a place of safety. As I've already told you, I think that we were both temporarily insane; the plan looked good to us then, although I could pick flaws in it now.

"After we had rested awhile, we explored the ledge. It was about twenty feet long by six wide, level and dry—owing to a projection above—as a floor. In one corner, a mass of vines half covered a hole in the cliff, which was curtained from within by skins. A faint light filtered around these, and we finally managed to move them enough to permit ourselves a glimpse of the interior.

"At the end of a narrow tunnel, a dozen feet or so from the entrance, the cave widened into a large chamber, which was lighted by a rude lamp, set high up on the wall, and a charcoal fire. Hunched over this fire and staring squarely at us, was the ugliest man I ever saw. At first, thinking he must see us, we drew back instinctively; but the outer darkness sheltered us, and as soon as we realized this, we settled down to watch.

"He was a little, gnome-like creature, this fire-tender. Blacker than most Dyaks and misshapen as a toad. His bestial face, sunk deep between heavy shoulders, was daubed with white, his eyes were round and puff-lidded, like a snake's, and he crooned to himself in a strange, weird gibberish as he stirred the fire with a long bone. Apparently, he was alone, for, look as hard as we could, we saw no other sign of life in the cavern.

"In whispers, we decided to wait until his back was turned; then to creep inside and spring upon him in much the same way that we had captured the Kapoeas in the jungle. It was the only way that we could see, and we had gone too far by that time to turn back empty-handed. Before

many minutes, our chance came.

"The priest ceased his chanting and stood up. Waddling on his shrunken legs, he moved away from the fire, and stooped over a bag that lay nearby. Before he could straighten up or turn, we were in the tunnel, but his quick ears caught the sound of our entrance and he whirled around on his haunches like a huge ape.

"In one panther-like jump, Prentiss landed in front of him and shoved the muzzle of an automatic pistol against his head.

"'No noise!' he hissed.

"Although he could not have understood the order, the priest made none. He was literally scared speechless. He could only glare and gurgle like a stranded carp at our menacing pistols. He was a very old man, but the chances are that never in his life had he received such a fright.

"Prentiss tried to question him in Dyak, but after several attempts, gave up in disgust. We had no time to waste in that fashion. Herding the priest in front of us, we made a circuit of the cave, looking for the other chamber Conroy had spoken of. The entrance to it was cleverly concealed, but we finally found it and forced our prisoner into it ahead of us, for we had no intention of giving him a chance to spread an alarm.

"This chamber was hollowed out of solid rock to the size of a large room. The roof and walls were hung with metal ornaments and long rows of grinning skulls. In the center was a cleared space where stood a lamp made from a long bamboo tube. Beyond this was a shadowy heap of bones and skulls, just as Conroy had described, and the whole place, full of smoke as it was, stunk fearfully. Prentiss bent over the pile and picked up something that made my heart pound madly and my senses reel.

"It was a nugget—a lump of virgin gold as big as a goose egg, and beneath that covering of bones there were thousands more just like it. Conroy had not lied—one glance told us that. There in that charcoal house of the head-hunters, was a king's ransom. The very thought of the thing fairly took my breath away. I was like a drunken man as I staggered through the haze to the treasure and ran my hands into it.

"I was instantly sobered by a loud cry from Prentiss.

"'The Dyak!' he shouted. 'My God, Morgaridge, the priest, man! Where is he?'

"He was right. For an instant, fascinated by the sight of the treasure we had come so far to get, we had forgotten our prisoner, and he had seized the opportunity to escape. Even as we stood there, sweating copiously and glaring wildly into the darkness in a hopeless attempt to discover him, we heard a loud crash, which told us that the news of our presence had gone forth.

"Together we dashed for the outer chamber; gained it, and found it empty, and quiet as a tomb. Not a sound broke the stillness of that awful place—not a sound. What was that? From somewhere in the room we had just quitted, came an ominous hum—a vibrant, tremulous buzzing, like the hum of a gas engine, but many, many times louder and more terrible. Suddenly, Con-

roy's words flashed into my mind: 'The bats—the bats—the humming bats!' Instinctively, I dodged, and at the same instant, Billy Prentiss gave a scream of agony.

"One look at him was enough. From somewhere in the darkness, a blow-gun had launched its deadly missle—the dart that now stood quivering in my companion's cheek. No mortal hand could save him, I knew that well; but for a second, I hesitated. Something struck me a sharp blow on the forehead. I looked up. The air was full of bats, great hairy bats, dull brown in color, with long, crooked talons, and horrible, blazing yellow eyes. As they flew around my head, the nasty things gave out a strange humming sound that nearly deafened me. Then the power to move came back to my shaking limbs.

"Seizing Prentiss by the collar, and swinging my free arm like a flail, I dashed through the cloud of bats for the tunnel exit. We made it; but on the ledge, my companion fell for the last time. The poison in his blood, and the bats which clung upon him and tore at his flesh, had done their work—he was stone dead. I left him there and sprang to the ladder.

"Somehow, still alive and whole,—the bats did not follow me after Prentiss fell—I reached the bottom of the cliff just as a horde of head-hunters, captained by their ugly priest, swept upon me. Eight times my automatic spat death into their midst—some small atonement for the brave life lost in that awful charnel pit—and then I dodged into the jungle.

'Two days later, more dead than alive, I reached my own men and comparative safety, and a month later, I quit the jungle for good."

Crooked Cards

BY ROSS ELLIS

Here's a smashing story of the blood lust that ofttimes comes with gold, and two men who didn't "go home."

FOR almost an hour Freddy Osborne had been alone in Schuyler Brown's office, cursing the telephone message that had called the lawyer away before their business was concluded. He was inexpressibly bored. It was with a distinct feeling of relief that he heard the sound of the opening door.

"About time you were coming," he commented irritably, without raising his eyes from the papers over whose wording Brown and he had wrangled all afternoon.

The only answer was an apologetic cough, and Osborne cast an impatient glance over his shoulder, to see the tall figure of a stranger looming blackly in the open doorway.

"I need advice," said the intruder in a subdued, melancholy voice. "This is a lawyer's office, isn't it?"

"It's a lawyer's office, right enough," began Osborne, but—"

"For God's sake, sir," interrupted the other, "put my mind at rest on this one thing: can a life insurance company refuse payment on a policy if the man who was insured should die by his own hand?"

Before the will of an almost forgotten uncle had given him more money to spend than he had previously believed the world contained, Osborne had spent a lean year as an insurance agent.

"I can answer that question," he said promptly, "and it will not cost you a cent. If the policy has no 'suicide clause,' and a year has elapsed since it was issued, the company must pay."

"That is all I wanted to know," said the man in the doorway. "Thank you, sir, and—goodbye."

He stepped out into the corridor. Freddy, watching him with vague uneasiness, was horrified to see that one thin hand grasped an ugly automatic pistol. Without an instant's hesitation the stranger removed his hat, raised the weapon and pointed it full at his high forehead.

Osborne was galvanized into sudden activity. Near his hand lay a volume of "Austin on Torts," and with a shrill yell he caught it up and flung it in the general direction of the impending tragedy. He heard a gasp of utter surprise and the tinkle of the pistol on the tiled floor. Then he was through the door, had scooped up the weapon and leaned, panting, against the wall, staring in a sort of wonder at the man who had found this world so perplexing that he preferred to venture the uncertainties of another.

The face that stared back at him

from across the hall was lean, thin-lipped, almost cadaverous. The eyes that gleamed from between their puckered lids had an expression of sordid experience, and the crisp dark hair was flecked with gray. Yet Osborne had an impression that the man was little older than himself—at most, not over thirty.

The stranger managed a wan smile.

"You are very—precipitate," he faltered. "I don't suppose I could—do it now, even if you gave me back the pistol." His voice rose shrilly. "Oh!" he wailed, "why didn't you let me finish it? Why didn't you?"

Some note in the other's excitement brought back Osborne's poise. He no longer swayed to the tragic possibilities of the moment.

"Nonsense!" he scoffed. "Come into the office and tell me what's bothering you. Maybe I can help you. If I can't, you'll still have the pistol to fall back on."

With a weary gesture of assent, the man stepped into the office and seated himself in the chair that Osborne indicated. Across the paper-littered table Freddy waited expectantly, his business with Brown forgotten. He was firmly in the grip of the demon of inquisitiveness which had led him many profitless miles on errands not his own.

"You couldn't help me," said the stranger in a dull voice. "Nobody could." His thin hands twitched nervously.

"Do you know how to play poker?" he suddenly demanded.

"I have had expensive instruction," grinned Osborne.

For a time that seemed interminable, the man was silent. He stared down at the table, his lips moving slightly, as if he were reviewing his experiences and marshalling the facts into orderly array.

"I am from Iowa," he said at length. "The town doesn't matter; but it's not a big one. A woman went down there five months ago, posing as a wealthy young widow looking for quiet. Our society folk took her up, and everybody thought she was about the finest thing that ever happened. I saw a lot of her. I thought I was in love.

"They think pretty well of me in my town. My father was its first mayor. I wanted to show her how big a man I was, and I boasted about how folks trusted me and how much money I handled. She made me feel as if I were wasting my time.

"She said that her friends here in Chicago were the big guns of finance, and that they bothered her all the time with inside information about the markets. She said she had introduced a young cousin to them and he had made eighty thousand dollars the first week.

"Well, she went away, and I fretted around for a month or so, feeling as if the juice had gone out of life. Then I got a letter from her. She said I should come to Chicago at once, as one of Morgan's confidential men was here from the East, and things were being framed up for a killing.

"I showed the letter to some of the moneyed people of the town, and we made up a pool. You see, we all knew her—or thought we did. I

came on here with forty-two thousand dollars. About seven thousand of it was mine, twelve thousand was money that I held in trust for some minors, and the balance belonged to the townspeople."

"Too bad! Too bad!" Osborne commiserated.

"The men she introduced me to," continued the man from Iowa, "bore names that you see in the papers every day—and they looked the part, too. They were crazy about poker, it seemed, and she said I had better play and be one of them. They were a bunch of card-sharps, and of course, got all my money, and I'm ruined and done for!"

He dropped his head on the table and his shoulders shook convulsively.

"But I don't see," protested Osborne, "how you could have lost even half such a sum of money without suspecting you were being robbed."

The man from Iowa lifted a miserable face.

"Oh, it was simple enough! They kept talking in millions, and seemed to be playing just for pastime, though their bets between themselves were sometimes enormous. I saw one of them win thirty-five thousand on two pairs. Another time I laid down a full house in a ten-thousand-dollar pot and the winner showed me that he had bluffed me out with a pair of kings.

"My bets kept getting bigger and bigger, and pretty soon I got to thinking in millions, too. You could not help it in that atmosphere. Finally, on the third day—that was yesterday—they got me with four aces. I bet all I had won and all the money that really belonged to me—and they raised me fifty thousand more. I called, thinking I had a certainty—and the other man laid down a straight flush!"

He spread out his hands in a gesture of finality.

"Even then I didn't suspect that there was anything crooked. I got out and went down to see Mrs. Carney—that's what she calls herself—and told her the fix I was in. She seemed to be sorry and offered me what she called 'get-away money,' but I wanted more than that. I was desperate, and kept at her to help me. I was willing to lose my own money, but I wanted to protect the ones who had trusted me. At last she told me flatly that the men I had thought financiers were professional gamblers and crooks—that I was a 'good thing' squeezed dry. And that's all!"

He laughed harshly.

"Now give me the pistol, and I'll get out of here and try to work my nerve back to where it was before you interrupted me. My life insurance will cover that trust fund. The rest won't matter."

The despair on the haggard young face moved Osborne to a sudden reckless resolve.

"Look here!" he cried. "Surely you are not intending to let them get away with an outrage like that. You and I will go straight to that woman's house and get either the money or information that will enable us to wring it from the other members of the gang. Just leave it to me."

"It's no use," sighed the other, but Osborne could see an eager light in his eyes

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the young millionaire. "Pull yourself together, man!" He glanced at his watch. "It's almost five-thirty—quite late enough to dine, under the circumstances. We'll go out now, have a bite of dinner to put heart into you, and then we'll settle this affair in jig-time."

He scribbled a word of explanation to Brown and 'phoned for a taxi.

Two hours later, as Freddy Osborne surveyed the exterior of the dingy old flat building on Grand Boulevard, he had a sense of wonder at agrarian credulity. It seemed to him that the veriest backwoodsman should have known at first glance that this dimly-lighted relic of World's Fair days could be no abode of wealth.

The apartment itself, with its cracked walls, sagging floors and cheap woodwork, harmonized perfectly with the building's exterior. But when Freddy turned to the redoubtable Mrs. Carney he thought he saw the answer to this riddle of folly.

She was young—younger than he would have thought possible in the light of the story he had heard. She wore a dark blue tea gown, which accentuated the ivory pallor of her throat and arms. The eyes that appraised him so frankly were dark and liquid. About the slim, silk-clad figure, there was a subtle air of distinction that, despite Osborne's preconceived opinion of her status, caused him to wait until she was seated before taking the chair she indicated.

The man from Iowa, who had been hovering in the background, now stepped forward.

"I want my money back," he said doggedly. "This gentleman is going to help me get it."

She looked at him speculatively for a moment.

"Just what," she asked at length, "is to be his course of procedure?"

She turned her gaze upon Osborne, and the insolence of her calm broke the spell that her personality had cast over him.

"That I do not yet know," he answered hotly, "but you may be sure of one thing—that I am not going to drop this matter until I see justice done!"

"Oh, I don't want to do anything more," she complained to the man from Iowa. "I am afraid. It isn't right to ask me. Go to Dace or Prague, but leave me out of it."

There was something appealing, almost caressing, in her tone, and Osborne's gorge rose at her evident hope of further power over her victim. He would have spoken, but the Iowan was before him.

"You've got to do it!" he said fiercely. "Understand, this gentleman is wealthy, and will do what is necessary to help me. I've got to have that money!"

"Yes," Osborne broke in, "you are going to produce that forty-two thousand dollars, or call your gang together and make it up between you. And you are going to do it right away!"

The thought that one so fair could be so infamous brought his indignation to a white heat.

"Tricks and subterfuges will not

help you," he warned her. "If you do your part I'll compound felony to the extent of letting you go free. If you don't, I'll see to it that you spend this night in jail."

He was conscious of a curious change in her face. It was like a palimpsest—as if between the lines of Holy Scripture had suddenly appeared the words of some devilish incantation. She rose, trembling with fear or anger, and disappeared into another room. When she returned her face was again calm, but there was a new note in her voice. It was brisk and business-like.

"I'll do my part," she said shortly. She threw on the weathered oak library table several packs of cards. One of these she opened and spread, face down, in a fan-like formation, with a skilful sweep of her fingers.

"Do you see anything queer about those cards?"

Osborne leaned forward and examined them closely. To all appearances they differed not at all from those his club steward provided.

From a drawer of the table she produced a reading glass.

"Look at the backs through this," she suggested.

Then he discerned that the backs of no two of the cards were exactly alike. With pen or brush some hand had shaded certain of the lines that formed the conventional design. He discarded the glass and found that, since he knew where to look, the marks were still perceptible. It was clear that, from one who held the key, his opponent's cards would have no secrets.

"I see," he admitted, "that these are marked cards. What are they to be used for—evidence?"

"Let me tell you something," she said impatiently. "These threats of arrest scare me, all right, because it's quite possible I wouldn't be protected; but so far as the rest of the gang is concerned they are just foolishness.

"Prague is a brother of the captain of this precinct; Grogan controls the vote of his ward; Dace is the man the Big Noise in the City Hall sends for when he wants any particularly dirty work done. They are all absolutely immune. One move against them through the courts, and your money would never save your reputation. They'd trump up some dirty charge against you that would anchor your name in the headlines of every paper in this country. They might even drag me in—make me the 'woman in the case'—because they'd know I'd never dare deny it!"

There was an intense earnestness in her voice and manner, that carried a sense of conviction. Freddy Osborne had an uneasy feeling that he was getting into deep waters; yet he could not forget the desperate plight of the man from Iowa.

"We've got to have that money," he said stubbornly.

"Very well, then. Listen to me—both of you I am the only person in the world who can get this man's money for him quickly and quietly. I'll do it on one condition:

"I want you"—she turned to Osborne's companion—"to give me a thousand dollars when it's all over. I'm going to get away from here—from the gang and everything it stands for. I'm sick of the lies, and

the cheating, and the insults, and I will not endure this life a day longer."

The Iowan made a gesture of protest, and seemed about to speak; but she whirled on him like a flash. "Oh, I mean it!" she flamed,—"every word of it! A thousand is a small enough price to pay. And—" the words dropped slowly, potent with meaning —"you'd better keep still!"

"All right. A thousand be it," he said sulkily.

She opened another pack of cards and selected from among them the aces and the eights. The aces, Osborne could see, were marked by one shaded line, while on the eights this line was crossed by three others, leaving eight exposed points.

"I will 'phone Prague," she explained, as she fitted a jeweler's glass to her eye and with steady hand altered the aces to the semblance of a lower value, "and tell him I've a new live one who will bet big money—to bring a plenty. He will come here with perhaps fifty thousand. I've seen him carry twice that when a big game was on. After a few hands, when it comes to your deal, I will slip in a new deck—this one I've just been working on. The cards will not be cut. You will get four aces, but the backs of them will look like four eights. Prague will get four kings. Then the amount of money you win will depend on how much you have the nerve to bet."

Osborne shook his head.

"I do not like your plan," he said dubiously. "It sounds feasible enough, and I have no scruples against robbing a robber; but I am afraid it is dangerous for you. I shouldn't like to see any harm come to you, just when you are planning to drop this sort of thing."

The woman threw him a curious glance.

"Oh, Prague will be wild, of course," she admitted, "but he'll never suspect I'd dare double-cross him. Don't worry about me, I'm not used to it. But I do want you to believe that this is my last job. I'll never be mixed up in anything like this again, even if I have to polish pans for a living in another woman's kitchen."

Osborne was strongly moved. Twice that day had chance brought him at hand-grips with tragedy. He thought of the bonds, the railroad shares, the mills, whose mounting income he could never spend. It seemed only fitting that one so buttressed against care should pay for such intrusion into the woes of others.

From an inner coat-pocket he drew a bulging note-case and selected two yellow bills. On one of his cards he scribbled a street name and number.

"Everything may not work smoothly," he said. "In that event it will be well for you to have your thousand dollars already in hand. If you find it desirable to leave Chicago, and will present this card to the New York address I have written on it, my sister will give you, at least, temporary shelter and protection."

He returned the case to his pocket.

"Now let us have Prague here and conclude this business at once."

The woman rose, glancing with troubled eyes first at one, then at the other. She advanced to Osborne, the

hand that held the bills outstretched.

"Take back the money," she said quietly. "This must not go on. I can't do it."

The man from Iowa was on his feet, his face threatening.

"Be careful!" he warned. "It's got to go on. It's all fixed and ready. 'Phone this man you call Prague."

She laughed shrilly.

"I won't!" she cried. "Listen!"—she turned to Osborne—"it's all a lie, a plan to trick you! This man never lost any money. He's been trailing you for three days. He brought you here to rob you!"

Her voice rose in a shriek—"Oh, Joe! Not that!"

Osborne was conscious of a crushing blow on the back of his head, the floor seemed to rise up to meet him, then a wave of blackness rolled over him. Just as he sank beneath it, he dimly heard the crash of a burst door and the sound of a familiar voice.

Said Schuyler Brown, as Osborne sat up dripping from the glass of water the other had just thrown in his face:

"If ever again I leave you in this wicked city I shall provide a police chaperon. You are too innocent to be trusted alone."

With an effort, Freddy reassembled his scattered faculties, and stared about the room. His erstwhile companion stood sullenly by the door in the grasp of a sturdy policeman. Another brass-buttoned figure gripped the rounded arm of the woman called Carney.

"When I got back to my office," continued Brown, with a patronizing grin, "the officer in the front of The Towers told me he had seen you getting into a taxi with that accomplished crook and former Thespian, Mr. Joe Rogers. I went down to Headquarters, and they were good enough to bring me out in the wagon to the furnished flat where his sister Myrtle is keeping house for him. This is the first time they ever got the goods on her. They used to do a clever turn in vaudeville, but Joe went to the dogs, and he seems to have carried his sister with him."

Osborne cast a sheepish glance at the girl. She said nothing, but her dark eyes were imploring. With her gaze upon him, Freddy got to his feet. His head ached furiously. His collar was wilted and his clothing drenched from Brown's ministrations. He was a ridiculous figure, and he knew it. For romance and adventure, he felt a disgust amounting to nausea. Yet he could not deny that mute appeal.

"There is not the slightest excuse for holding the girl," he assured them all. "She was warning me of my danger when the blow was struck. Let's get out of here. This is one time when I certainly need a drink."

He still grasped the two crumpled bills and bit of pasteboard, and as he passed the forlorn little person in the blue tea gown, he thrust them into her hand.

"The experience was worth the money," he said, in a tone so low that it baffled the straining ears of Schuyler Brown, "and the offer still holds good."

Two Burglars and a Cracksman

BY WILLIAM KNAPP GIBBS

Some one once said, "When thieves fall out, then honest men get their due," but this is a case where the honest man did not profit by a professional mix-up.

CASTING a hasty glance to the right and left, and having the appearance of one being pursued, a well-dressed man slackened his pace before an imposing office building, his crafty dark eyes burning an inquiring path among the faces of the throng passing out of the swinging doors.

The town clocks struck six—first the one in the court-house tower, and then, farther away, the one in the city hall. This one struck five times slowly, hesitated a moment, struck eleven times with great vigor, struck once with a big, final boom and was through. No amount of repairing could cure the city hall clock of this peculiarity. It kept time but kept it according to a private way of its own.

Passing in between the marble pillars that guarded the entrance of the Trades Building, the man ignored the elevators and began to ascend the stairs. Four flights up, he turned down the corridor, his footsteps being scarcely audible above the noise of the street and the frequent closing of elevator doors that slammed like the closing of an iron lip. He paused, removed an afternoon paper from his pocket and read:

> Dr. James Whitbeck, 456 Trades Building, left for New York this afternoon to deliver a lecture before the Medical Association, on his recently-perfected cancer cure. He will be gone a week.

With cat-like steps, the figure crept toward the door which bore, in modest letters, the inscription—James Whitbeck, M. D. The clang of an elevator door startled the stodgy figure. He paused, listened intently, then tried the door. Much to his surprise, it opened, and he stood face to face with a tall, dark, middle-aged man of professional bearing. "Good evening, Doctor," he said blandly. "I did not expect to find you here." The voice did not betray what was passing through the speaker's mind.

"No?"

"I'll tell you why I'm here," ventured the newcomer. "I'm Barrett, of Central Detail, and I came up here to catch a thief."

"What's the matter, have I been overcharging my patients?" questioned the other, smiling.

"No; you don't understand. We're after a man who calls himself 'Jeff.' We've been on his trail for weeks, but we can't seem to get within hailing distance. We don't know what he looks like, but he invariably leaves a note for the police, signed 'Jeff.' He makes a specialty of doctors' offices."

"Why look for him here?"

"For the very good reason that you are supposed to be well on your way to New York. The afternoon paper says you are to deliver a lecture in New York and left this afternoon. 'Jeff' works while the doctors are out, and we are dead sure he will come here this evening. Headquarters has a squad of men looking for him and we'll get him sooner or later."

Then, in a confiding tone, the speaker said:

"You see, I'm anxious to make the 'pinch' myself, as it will give me a stronger 'pull' with the chief. I have a proposition to make and if you'll help me, I'll be sure to get him. What do you say? Will you?"

"Of course; anything I can do will give me great pleasure. You can count on me."

"Thanks. Now my proposition is this: Jeff is shrewd; he will pretend to be sick if he finds you here. You give him something, and while you are doing that, give him every chance to get your watch and your money. Then I'll do my part."

Barrett's persuasion won the other to the agreement to stay as long as he could and still catch an early evening train for New York. Barrett screened off one corner of the room, and selecting a comfortable chair, began his vigil.

A fine drizzle of rain dripped from the clouds. The asphalt street glistened black and shining under the electric lights. A second figure, short and squatty, entered the Trades Building. He rode up to the fourth floor, walked swiftly to Room 456, his heels beating a sharp staccato on the tile floor. He walked boldly into the doctor's office.

"It's lucky I found you here, Doctor," he began, almost immediately. "I was talking with a man this afternoon and he recommended you to me. I need something for my nerves; they're all gone to pieces, you know."

"That so? Come in the consulting room and let me look you over." The usual routine of a physician over, the "patient" was given a small dose of liquid from a bottle that set on the doctor's desk. As soon as he saw he was not being watched, the 'patient' turned the contents of the glass into the cuspidor, and turning to the doctor, said:

"How long before it works?"

"It should take effect immediately," came the reply, but you had better let me examine your heart."

The "patient" unbuttoned his coat and vest, and as the doctor bent over and placed his ear to the other's chest, the latter extracted a wallet and watch from the former's pocket.

"I don't find anything the matter with your heart, but you had better take another dose of this," and another dose from the bottle was given the "patient." This time he was watched and he had to swallow it. He thought is quite the worst of anything he ever had tasted."

"Let me know how you feel tomorrow."

"Yes,—" a hand was laid roughly on the speaker's shoulder, interrupting his reply. "What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, when he had regained his equanimity.

"The chief wants to see you, Jeff," calmly announced Barrett. "We've

'queered' your little game at last. I happened to see you lift Doctor Whitbeck's wallet and watch just now. So you're a 'dip' too, eh? We didn't know that before."

"Well, you got me," sulked the prisoner, dejectedly, "but I'm no piker. I'll go quietly."

"These will make me feel a little more secure," remarked Barrett, as he fastened the handcuffs on the prisoner's wrists. Turning to the doctor, he said:

"We'll want to see you probably, when you get back from New York."

"But what about my watch and my money?" the doctor asked.

"Oh, you'll get them all right. We need them for evidence and I'll have to take them to the station."

The two men—detective and prisoner—passed out and closed the door. The physician called a taxicab company and asked them to have a taxi in front of the Trades Building in forty-five minutes.

The outer door of 456 Trades Building opened noiselessly. Two figures entered stealthily. As the light was switched on, one who had been present at the little "drama" enacted thirty minutes before, would have recognized the two as the same detective and prisoner, although now the handcuffs were not in evidence.

"Guess we gave the old boy the slip, Jim," said Barrett. "He fell for our game like a two-year-old."

"Well, you didn't need to handle me so rough," broke in the other.

"I watched you take your medicine," chaffed Barrett. "Was it good?"

"Oh, hell, you make me sick! Let's get this job done and get out of here." They gathered up everything of value and placed it in a grip that seemed to have been left there for their especial benefit. Both worked in silence. Neither knew that a pair of eyes watched them from behind the same screen that had formed Barrett's hiding place a short time before.

Barrett broke the silence. "That's all we want," he said. "If we've overlooked anything, I'm sorry." As the two emerged from the consulting room, they faced a .44 calibre revolver.

"The game's up, boys," said the man who, at that moment, was master of the situation. "I'll take my watch and money."

"You're a shrewd one, all right, Doctor Whitbeck," parried Barrett. "We take our hats off to you."

"Cut that chatter and face the wall." They obeyed. "Now I'll just relieve you of these cannons. There, that's better. Now, unload everything you have in your pockets and be quick about it. That chauffeur down in front will get restless if I keep him waiting much longer."

At the point of the revolver, the two culprits did as they were bidden.

"Sure you haven't missed anything?" asked the man with the gun.

"That's all there is, boss."

"How about the bracelets?"

"I've got 'em," replied Barrett, doggedly.

"Put one on your wrist and one on your pal's," ordered the man with the gun. "Now, let me give you a tip. My car is waiting down in front; don't you two make any noise or try to fol-

low me or I'm afraid I might lose control of my trigger-finger."

"Aren't you going to send us to the 'stir'?" queried Barrett, somewhat surprised.

"No; I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, that's sure white of you, Doc."

Then in slow, measured tones, came the reply:

"Doctor Whitbeck left for New York this afternoon."

"What?" came from Barrett and his pal, almost as one word.

"You heard me, now keep quiet. That chauffeur is waiting and I don't want to miss him, especially since I have to carry this grip you were so generous as to pack for me."

"Say, pard," began Barrett, "you're clever, but who are you?"

Keeping them both covered with his revolver, the man picked up the grip, opened the office door and inserted the key from the outside, then answered:

"I'm Jeff."

The door closed softly, the key grated in the lock, and he was gone.

The Moon on the Mesa

BREVARD MAYS CONNOR

A victim of the fury of the rebels in Mexico, an American, returns to his home after recovery from his wounds. He finds his native wife gone, and trails the Mexican who took her.

WHEN John Priestman was released from the hospital in El Paso, he paused only long enough to visit a gunsmith before crossing to Juarez, where, after a private conversation with an official of his acquaintance, he boarded a southbound train.

This latter rocked along through the night at little better than a burro's pace, over crooked rails and hastily propped bridges, evidences of the insurrectos' ruthlessness. Now and then they passed a clump of glowing fires with weary sentinels watching dully as they passed; less often they were halted and searched by ragged officials. Several of these shook Priestman's hand, but when he asked the same question of all in an eager whisper, all nodded negatively and sorrowfully, and wished him God-speed.

He did not resent these failures or the many delays. The impatience that had kept him tossing through the weary weeks in the hospital had ebbed from his blood, leaving in its place a stoic calm. The world's trails were not limitless;—given the impulse, a man could search them all in a life-time, and he was yet young and with that impulse writ plain in his steady gray eyes and in the firm set of his square jaw.

In the inside pocket of his coat there was a long, official-looking envelope, which he drew out at times and regarded with mingled amusement and bitterness. It contained a government voucher for fifteen thousand dollars, granted him as indemnity for the loss he had suffered at the hands of the Mexican rebels. A sympathetic young interne had secured it for him while he lay delirious with the fever consequent to the wound in his lungs, it having been the young interne's natural belief that his patient would be surprised and delighted. But he had been disappointed. Priestman had merely smiled that smile of mingled amusement and bitterness, and his thanks had been plainly forced. Fifteen thousand dollars!

In the pocket of Priestman's vest, with the flap carefully buttoned down upon it, was another piece of paper, which he took out from time to time and read. It was a note, short and written in Spanish, and so hurriedly that it bore but little resemblance to his wife's hand-writing. It ran:

"I love you no longer and am leaving you for Manuel Perez, taking Anna with me,

Lola."

Anna was her old serving woman;

Perez, the leader of the bandits who had sacked his hacienda and driven him, wounded, across the border.

At noon the next day, he descended at Gallego, a small cluster of adobe jacals drowned beneath a green wave of mesquite trees. At sight of him the old livery-man, as brown and as wrinkled as elephant skin, started and paled, and then seized his hand.

'Dios! You, Senor! I thought you were in——" he shrugged his shoulders and looked to Heaven. "A horse? Of a certainty. The best in my stable. The roan I bred and broke myself.

"We love you in Gallego, Senor. You are as one of us," he said significantly. "Your thoughts are as ours, Senor, and your hopes also. God speed you and your purpose."

The roan's gait was easy and swift, and soon bore him through the forest of thick-growing mesquite and out upon the open prairie beyond. Without a break, the gentle slopes rolled westward to the misty wall of the Sierra Trahumare, green and smooth as the mid-sea waves in a calm. He threw back his shoulders and breathed in deep, deep! This was the land he had lived and loved in.

The sun had sunk behind the blue parapet to the west, tipping its jagged peaks with gold, and the purple sweep of the shadows were following close on his heels as he paused on the crest of a low rise and gazed down on what had been his home.

Gaping adobe walls, blackened and roofless, were all that remained of the hacienda. The two giant cottonwoods still towered above the ruin, but they had been cut lop-sided by the flame, and what leaves remained hung sere and lifeless. The outhouses were intact, and the wind-mill, leaning at a crazy angle, still fulfilled its functions. Its rapidly whirring wheel was the only movement in the landscape; the clank-clank of the pump, the only sound.

He rode slowly down the slope and peered into the blackened gap that had been the front door. Nothing remained but a mass of charred beams. The place had been well sacked.

He turned away, his lips drawn into a hard straight line, and then his eyes narrowed with interest. A tiny beam of light filtered forth from the door of one of the outhouses.

He dismounted—and approaching quietly, looked within. Beneath a crucifix on the wall burned the stub of a candle, and below, a woman knelt, praying audibly. He stepped within, and at the sound, the woman turned, a gaunt, dry old woman, whose hollow cheeks paled at sight of him.

"*Sanctu spiritu!*" she gasped, and crossed herself. "Ah, it is *you;* at first I thought it your spirit."

"It is I, Anna. What are you doing here?"

A hard glitter came into the small beady eyes.

"I came to pray, to pray to Anna, my patron saint, she of the just heart and the drawn sword of vengeance."

"For whom do you pray?" he asked, striving to keep his voice steady, though his whole body shook with the heavy beating of his heart.

"I pray for the soul of her that

is dead," replied the old woman, "and for the life of him that lives."

"Dead?" he murmured, wetting his dry lips.

"These two weeks. Look!" She held out a tiny pearl-handled dagger with a long thin blade. "She drove this — the knife you gave her — through her heart—"

"No—no," she protested, clutching the weapon to her breast as he stepped forward to take it. "It is mine—mine, who stilled her first cry against this old bosom and caught her last breath on these old lips. She was my child, my daughter, if not of my flesh.

"She was my life," brooded the old woman, fondling the weapon, "and this sharp thing has yet to serve."

The little beady eyes studied him with ill-suppressed hate.

"She loved you, gringo,—at the last! 'Why does he not come for me?' she would say when the nights were long. 'Why does he not come?' she would mutter the long, hot afternoons. Why did you not come, gringo?"

He bit his lip and was silent. The wrinkled face contracted and she beat her hands together with pitiful rage.

"She should not have loved you! She should not have mated with you! On my knees I begged her; nights I have prayed that it would not be, prayed and planned, and God forgive me for it!" She covered her face with her hands and trembled.

"But she should not have loved you," she whispered after a moment.

"Why should she not have loved me?"

The woman looked up at him scowling.

"You are not our race, our kind, our blood. You did not think our thoughts or eat our food. You did not live as it has been bred in us to live. Old eyes are wise and can see tragedy far off; they see the spider on the web when the silly flies are playing near. One day you would have felt the call of your own people; one day you would have felt the call of a woman that was fair, like yourself. Oh, I know. It is nature, and has happened before. Then what would have become of her, my daughter?" The wrinkled hands were beating together again. "She should not have loved you! She should not have loved you—"

"Be still!" he cried, for the old, cracked voice had risen almost to a shriek. She subsided and watched him with the glittering eyes of a rat at bay.

"What are you going to do, Senor Americano?"

"Perez," he replied, "where is he?"

Leaning back she cackled shrilly.

"Perez? 'Tis time indeed to look for Perez. Your gringo blood is slow to move. Perez is far by now. You cannot put your hand upon him where he is going."

"Which way?" he asked.

The woman studied him a moment in silence.

"Why ask me, Senor? He came, so they say, from a little town in Sonora—Suaharipa it is called. That is to the west."

Priestman turned abruptly to the door.

"Where are you going?" she de-

manded suddenly, as if afraid.

"Westward," said Priestman.

"Wait, Gringo!" she called shrilly. "Take this word from a woman who is old and wise. 'Vengeance rides in a hot saddle or vengeance there is none.'"

"I will find him," he replied simply.

"Aye, you will *find*——" she muttered, and he rode away with her shrill chuckle ringing in his ears.

Three days later, he rode into Sauharipa, the roan walking stiffly, and he himself aching in every nerve and keeping in the saddle through sheer will alone. Man and beast both were caked and plastered with the white alkali dust of the plains.

The landlord of the little inn ran to take his horse and help him down.

"A bed? Surely, Senor, a bed can be had here at any hour, and the sweetest in all Sonora. You have ridden far?"

"Priestman nodded briefly.

"I came to see my—my friend, Manuel Perez? Is he in town?"

A scowl replaced the easy affability on the other's face.

"Your friend, Perez? With your pardon, Senor, it is a surprise to know that such a rascal has a friend." His face and hands became animated with his wrongs. "Think of it, Senor! he comes, this Perez, without a rag, without a cent, and I take him in and care for him for the love I bore his father who is now among the angels. And what does the ingrate do, with his flattering eyes and smooth tongue? He runs away with the girl that I have brought at vast expense from Chihuahua to entertain my patrons. Aye, even with La Paloma, the dove, as they called her, for she sang as sweet as the dove at sunset until the old man wept and bought much wine. And when she danced! The young men were all aflame and flocked like the flies there about the honey-pot.

"And now! I am ruined, bankrupt! My company all go down to make eyes at that wench of Macato's, she with the voice of a bull-bat and the ankles of an ox! Perez is not here, no! And good fortune for him. My eyes are old but they can still see the sights on a rifle barrel."

"Where did he go, and when?" broke in Priestman impatiently.

The landlord threw out his hands.

"Two days ago. Where? I wish to Heaven I knew. Juan, the teamster, declares he met them on the west trail."

"Two days ago," muttered Priestman, "west!" Then aloud—"Wake me in two hours and see that I have a change of horses—the best in town."

"Aye," grumbled the other as he led the horse away. "The best in town! Those in the devil's business go well-mounted. Perez, indeed!"

Two hours later, Priestman rode forth, blinking in the bright noon sunlight. A little, naked muchacho guided him to the trail, and he set off, his face toward the west.

Nearer and nearer loomed the jagged mountain wall, until the drab and slate shadings of its fissures and promontories stood out clearly through the thinning veil that distance lends. During the heat of the day he camped beneath some clumps of yucca or overhanging boulder, for the trail grew steadily rougher and

the landscape more broken. He pushed on again at dusk and rode the cool nights through beneath the silent, winking stars.

The fourth night he rode up to the dim lamp above the fonda or little adobe hotel, in Baluco. A man lounging in the shadow peered up at him and then slunk off around the corner of the building. There was something strange in this abrupt flight, and more; even in the darkness Priestman was struck by some faint resemblance. He paused irresolutely for a moment and then with a slight frown, went within.

"A room," he told the landlord, and then whirled about in time to see a fece peering in at the window. It was gone too quickly to be recognized, but as he followed the landlord up the dark, narrow stairs, he loosened the pistol at his hip.

He dropped his boots noisily on the floor, and then slipped over in his stocking feet and took his place behind the door.

Some pariah of the village howled at the moon dropping wearily-wan below the horizon, and a guitar tinkled faintly for a moment and then was still. There was a low murmur of voices in the room below, but these too, ceased soon, and with the going of the moon the world became dark and silent.

It was probably an hour later that a slight draught roused him from a half-doze. The door was opening slowly and without sound. He pressed close against the wall and as a dim figure stole past, he lifted the pistol and brought it down, butt-first.

The intruder reeled to his knees and Priestman was upon him like a cat. Wresting the knife from the nerveless fingers he sent it clattering into a corner and pressed the chill muzzle of the gun against the other's temple.

"Not a word," he hissed savagely. The only answer was a whimper of fear as the man sank down full-length on the floor.

Still keeping the steel threat against the other's face, he struck a match and held it close, then with an exclamation of disgust, he snapped out the flame.

"You, Roderiguez!"

"Senor," moaned the man, "spare me!"

"Roderiguez," he said again, reproachfully! "I did not think it of you to come in the night with a knife in your hand. What have I ever done but good for you? Who had your wife buried worthily, when otherwise she would have been thrown upon the paupers' heap? Who sat up nights with your son when he had the smallpox and none would come near him?"

"I am a dog," moaned the man. "I am a cur of the alleys. It was Perez—"

"Perez?"

"He passed through here yesterday, much afraid, and looking backward down the trail. He told me one followed who would kill him and me, if he found us. I did not know it was you, Senor, but when you came I was afraid for myself. Senor, I was not one of those that burned the hacienda. On the sweet blood of Christ, I was here, then, here in the

hills. Spare me, Senor, spare me!"

"I believe. Where has Perez gone?"

"Into the mountains, he and the woman, even as far as Nacori,—a full day's ride. He is much afraid." He crawled over and touched Priestman's knee timidly. "Forgive me, Senor. I did forget my wife and the child. Let me serve you."

Priestman smiled through the darkness.

"I forgive, if you show me the trail to Nacori at daybreak. Now go."

He sank down on the bed still smiling. But one day's ride! He was smiling when he fell asleep.

A shrill insistent noise beat its way through the web of his dreams and he awoke with a start. Below his window there was a loud altercation, and above the sleepy protests of a man's bass, the shrill soprano of a woman's voice rose excitedly.

"I tell you I wish the horse now! I cannot wait until day breaks. Am I to sit and bandy words with a fool the whole blessed night? Gold takes no heed of night or day. Here!"

There came a clink of metal and a changed note in the man's voice, departing footsteps, and only the low grumble of the woman.

Priestman lay for some time, a dim thought growing in his sleep-dulled brain. There was a familiar ring in that voice; somewhere he had heard it just so shrill and excited, and gradually a picture came to him —the stump of a candle burning beneath a crucifix!

He leaped to the window and leaned out. Below, with the rays of the swinging lamp full upon her, was the thin figure and sere, wrinkled face of old Anna! Before he could cry out in his surprise, a man led a horse up, and with the nimbleness of a youth, she had climbed into the saddle and gone clattering up the narrow street.

He fell back into the room, bewildered. What was that tattered old bird of evil doing on his heels? It could be nothing good surely, and there came to him, as clearly as if she still stood beneath the window, the chuckle that had rung in his ears that night at the hacienda, as well as the words that accompanied it: 'Vengeance rides in a hot saddle or vengeance there is none!'

That was what she had meant then, and that was why she was here now, —to warn Perez of his coming!

He sprang for the door and sprawled across a recumbent figure.

"*Heu!*" gasped Roderiguez; "I guard your door that none might come, Senor. Is it dawn so soon?"

"It is time for me to go," snarled Priestman, and lifting the dazed man bodily, he rushed him ahead down the stairs.

"My horse, quick! And the trail to Nacori!"

When dawn came, he stared eagerly ahead, but no glimpse did he catch of the old witch-like creature. The trail wound continually up, up, and ever up. He rode in the chill shadow of towering cliffs and crept along the edges of abrupt precipices, but push ahead as fast as he dared, only the blank vistas of the narrow track ahead met his eyes.

High up in a cleft he saw a small clump of houses which he knew to

be Nacori, but the trail in its windings never seemed to bring him closer and he chafed under the delay.

It was mid-afternoon when he climbed the narrow main street. Not one glimpse had he gained of the flying figure ahead!

Beneath the bean-vines in front of the fonda sat a full, languorous-lidded woman. Her mouth was painted into a perfect scarlet bow and her face was white with rice powder. He walked up to her, struck by a sudden presentiment.

"La Paloma?"

The woman roused herself a little as a cat does when it is called, and preening herself, smiled.

"Ah, the Senor knows me though I do not remember his face. At Suaharipa, was it? I like you Americanos; you are so generous. Sit down, Senor, I am thirsty—" she yawned frankly—"and bored."

"I wish to find Perez," he replied shortly.

Her eyes half closed with a conscious lure and she stretched her round shapely arms above her head.

"Ah, *Dios!* I grow fat and slow in this place. Sit down, handsome Americano, and I will call for wine—"

"Perez," he insisted, "where is he"

The woman sneered impatiently.

"Oh, Perez! He is not worth the worry. He has the heart of a chicken, and he is also a dog, for here he brings me with his mouth full of lies, and here—he leaves me."

"Leaves—where has he gone?"

"Who cares?" pouted the woman. "Am I not better than a thousand such as he? Men have said so who heard La Paloma sing."

Priestman took a small purse from his pocket and clinked it in his hand.

"Which way?" he asked, "and when?"

"Across the mesa above—an hour since—see, the trail behind the chapel there! I swear it—ah—thanks. And you will not stay?"

"My business is urgent, good-bye."

The woman shrugged her shoulders and fondled the purse.

"Good-bye, Senor, and when you find the dog, may there be buzzards on his head and hip. B-r-rr, this mountain air is cold. I, I go back where men are warm."

Priestman had turned away unheeding. Another clink of metal roused the landlord to unwonted activity, and he was soon freshly mounted and toiling up the trail behind the little chapel.

Dusk had fallen before he topped the last stretch of ascent and came out on the vast upland plain, stretching away to the west and seemingly as flat as a floor. Beneath the full argent moon it shone like silver, and the fresh hoof-marks showed plainly in the loose sand. He spurred forward, humming under his breath.

He had hardly covered a mile when he drew up at another trail, cutting in obliquely and joining the one he was following. He frowned at that and hastened on.

Suddenly the trail dipped down into a deep arroyo, and drawing rein among the full shadows in the bottom, he dismounted. From the other bank, its source hidden from him, a pale thread of silver smoke was coiling up into the silver sky!

Drawing his pistol, he crept up the

other bank and slowly, cautiously, peered over the edge. Not ten feet away, a man lay stretched out on his back beside the embers of a dying fire, and upright in his breast a thin shaft glowed and sparkled in the moonlight like a spout of foaming water!

Priestman drew himself up and knelt down beside the man. He did not look at the face; there was no need. The thing that claimed his attention was the slender dagger through his heart and its handle of mother-of-pearl, gleaming so brilliantly in the moonlight!

He whirled at a low chuckle behind him and looked down into the withered, grinning face of old Anna!

"What did I tell you, gringo?" she cackled. "There was not heat enough in your saddle, eh? Your northern blood is cold upon the trail, not burning as does ours, even in such withered frames as mine."

"You did this, Anna?" he demanded.

"None other, Senor. He was asleep and it was easy."

"But why—why?"

"Was she not my daughter?" stormed the old woman. "Was she not my child? And had he not driven her to the grave?" She sank back weakened by her vehemence.

"I told you, Senor, that sharp thing had yet to serve. I prayed God to leave me strength to push it home. Now I can die."

Her eyes closed wearily and her tone became low and hurried.

"Bend down. I have something yet to tell, for I would not have my soul winging up into this pure moonlight with a stain upon it. Lean down—close—there! She loved you at the last, as I have said, Senor,—and she loved you at the first—and all the time—!"

"The note," he gasped, a dry pricking in his throat, "she said—"

"*I* said, Senor. I wrote the note, and I helped Manuel there carry her off against her will. Nay!" and she stayed his uplifted, threatening arm with a shaking hand—"nay! If you strike, you but hasten it a moment and I have more to tell. Lean close! in Chihuahua at Santez, the sadler's —behind the cathedral—there is a child, a blue-eyed child—"

His hands grasped her shoulders so tightly they seemed to wrench the feeble whisper from her breast.

"Aye, Senor, her child—and *yours* —gringo!"

And then old Anna turned her face to the ground.

Priestman arose slowly and as he did so, a long, official-looking envelope fell from his pocket. He picked it up and looked at it for a moment with a smile.

"Fifteen thousand dollars!" he murmured, his lips curving downward, and then he tore it through and through and cast the pieces away from him. The debt was paid!

Smiling still, he mounted his horse and turned toward Chihuahua.

The Master Hand

BY H. P. HOLT

We are all familiar with the card sharpers who infest our great ocean liners, and if you ever have had experience with this gentry, you'll enjoy this yarn of the trimmers trimmed.

AS the great liner swung clear of the quay at Melbourne, three men, leaning over different parts of the ship's rail, heaved a sigh of relief. One was Tod Marsden, another was Dandy Dick Erridge, and the third was ponderous Peter O'Flanagan.

Dick Erridge, as befitted a gentleman of his type, was travelling first-class, for though he had a variegated career in two hemispheres, he always found it paid to travel with the best people. They had the money, as a rule, and Dandy Dick hated to be where there was no money.

Tod Marsden and O'Flanagan were on the second-class deck, among the great bulk of fairly-well-off and yet not-quite-rich-enough-to-go-first passengers. They ought both to have saved money enough and gone third, for accommodation abaft the rail was not at all bad. Plenty of men and women who looked more desirable as companions than either Tod Marsden or O'Flanagan had booked third; but both of them, each in his own way, had formed a vague idea of picking up a pound or two during the long run from Australia to England.

The three sighs were not broken-hearted ones. Indeed, O'Flanagan's was perhaps more a grunt of satisfaction than anything. Although the trio had trodden entirely different paths in that vast continent, their reasons for feeling a sense of relief were to some extent similar. Certainly, the boat had still to call at Adelaide and Fremantle; and the police, these days, have a wonderful knack of using the telegraph wires to good advantage. The great thing is to get clear of the first port. Even when your conscience is worn threadbare, the instinct of self-preservation remains, and one does not feel perfectly safe until the wide ocean separates one from possible complications and personal discomfort.

There is a feeling among old stagers that it is always wise to exercise the utmost caution in making friends during the first few days of the steamer's run, for the sheep are sometimes not easily distinguished from the goats. This applies with peculiar force to the boats bound homeward from Australia, as danger lurks unseen equally in the bluff individual who looks as though he might have made his fortune with hard work, and the well-dressed, suave person who likes a hand at cards and says little about his occupation.

It took Dandy Dick Erridge two days to find out that pigeons waiting

to be plucked were not numerous among the passengers in the first saloon. He had long passed the stage of being crumpled up by one cool stare, but a constant succession of cool stares and a battery of frozen shoulders make some impression on the most case-hardened sinner. He knew that, in spite of his gorgeous raiment, it would be a little obvious to hang about the card room much, in the early stages of the trip, so he toyed with a magazine in a deck-chair for several hours a day, reading some of the time, and, for the rest, trying to sum up the folly and funds of those near him. He had one ray of hope the second evening. He nodded affably to a man who appeared to have a leaning towards alcohol, and to his joy, was invited in response to take a little liquid nourishment.

"Beastly hot. Whiskey's the only thing that seems to keep me cool," said the stranger. "My name's Simpkins—Jay Simpkins. Are you bound for England?"

"Yes. Are you?" asked Dandy, rejoicing exceedingly in secret.

"Yes. The dad has sent me off for a six months' holiday." He relapsed into chuckles at the prospect and then a shadow passed over his face. "He's a wise old bird, my dad, but all the same, I wish I hadn't made him a promise."

"Ah," commented Dandy, with an elaborate show of not being really interested.

"Yes. The fact is," went on Jay Simpkins, "he knows I kick over the traces a bit sometimes"—he gave a significant nod at his glass—"and so he made me promise to hand all my money over to the purser."

"And you did so?" Dandy yawned as he spoke, and he rather prided himself on the neat way he did it, considering his mingled anxiety and disappointment.

"Yes; all in notes, excepting fifty in 'sovs'. The dad suggested that. The old man's idea was that I could draw a 'sov.' a day for drinks and sports and things, and expenses on landing at the different places, leaving the rest safe for me to pick up at Southampton."

Dandy succeeded in looking vacuous while he rapidly turned over in his brain the possibilities in this direction. They were not glowing. He had hopes that were much more ambitious, but there appeared to be only a small chance of gratifying them. As gracefully as he could do it, he left Jay Simpkins, who, after half an hour, had almost ceased to be coherent, and strolled across the dividing line to the second-class deck.

He dropped into the smoking room. There was the usual little collection of halfpenny "nap" enthusiasts, all very much second-class. O'Flanagan and Marsden, being of the same breed, had naturally drifted together. They looked just what they were, and they sat in a corner, gradually developing a settled gloom, for they were out of it and they knew it. When Dandy Dick's eye fell on them, it struck him that they looked dismal enough to welcome a stranger, and he was not mistaken. He knew how to speak to men of their type and within half an hour he had summed them up fairly accurately. He dropped a delicate hint or two, convey-

ing the impression that he was always open to consider a "deal" that had profit attached to it, and left them in quite a cheerful frame of mind.

"That young gentleman is as wide as the Pacific Ocean," commented O'Flanagan as Dandy Dick's form disappeared.

Tod Marsden closed one eye to show that he appreciated the fact. "There's no knowing, but we three might be able to do a little business of some sort on the ship," he said.

As Dandy Dick had the subtle virtue of being a first-class passenger, and was not snobbish, he soon managed to make friends in the second saloon. He was careful to keep O'Flanagan and Marsden in the background, for their friendship was not a social acquisition, but Tod Marsden had a happy inspiration, and the three held a council of war. So far, only an occasional sweepstake on the day's run had been arranged. Tod's idea was that Dandy might with advantage, organize the usual daily sweep. The rest would be easy with three of them in it. The draw would be fair when the total was small, but when there was anything worth having, one of the trio would win it.

"Equal shares for each of us, of course," said Marsden.

Dandy Dick shrugged his shoulders. "It's hardly worth the trouble, anyhow," he said. "There will only be a few pounds in it. I don't mind, though. It will kill time." And from that time onward, their luck was remarkably good when the sweepstake was a heavy one. Nobody, however, would have dreamed of suspecting Dandy Dick.

Occasionally the elegant crook would join in an innocent game of poker on the second-saloon deck, and when Jay Simpkins was sufficiently sober, Dick persuaded him to join the party. Jay invariably lost the better part of his daily sovereign, and Dandy Dick, whose education at cards lacked but little, was always the winner; but it pleased Jay, whose only complaint was that he had plenty of money on the ship but could not touch it.

"Why don't you tell the purser you have changed your mind and will keep the money yourself?" asked Dick artlessly.

"Jolly good idea," agreed Jay. "You come with me."

The purser smiled. It is his business to smile on such occasions.

"You know perfectly well, Mr. Simpkins, your own instructions were," he said, "that I was not to let you touch it on any consideration because you would be sure to fool it away. You would only blame me now if you lost it. Besides that, it would be against all rules, once you have entrusted it to me in that way."

Jay consoled himself with sundry whiskies and sodas, and Dick had a heart-to-heart talk with Tod Marsden and O'Flanagan.

Marsden's little eyes began to glitter. It was his secret sorrow that, though he had a number of excellent ideas, he had not the personality to carry them through. Here, however, was a clear chance. Dandy Dick, who had acted on the square so far as the trio were concerned, could easily negotiate a little deal. He called a

conference in his cabin and put the matter before his two confederates.

"It's no use us bluffing one another if we are to carry it through," he began. "This simpleton has the goods and he's asking for trouble. He can't draw from the purser, but he can borrow from us for a consideration, and arrange with the purser to pay us so that we shall be on the safe side."

Dick began to see interesting possibilities of several varieties.

"Well," he said laconically.

"He would give his ears for the loan of a couple of hundred pounds. If we let him have it, he can sign away two-fifty. We should be fifty to the good on that deal and—well, he plays poker. See?"

"I'd come in like a shot, but I haven't got money with me to put up," replied Dandy Dick, knowing he was on safe ground.

Peter O'Flanagan blinked hard. Dirty tricks in the ring had been his main source of income for years, but he was astute, and this was money for nothing.

"How much could you go, Marsden?" he inquired.

"I can do nearly half if you will do the rest."

O'Flanagan blinked stolidly for a few minutes, and then he fumbled in his belt.

"I presume that if I arrange it all, I stand in for a third," said Dandy Dick.

The others were powerless without him, and they agreed, on condition that the poker profits were also equally divided. Dick Erridge permitted himself to indulge in an expansive smile as soon as everything was agreed upon. He calculated that Jay Simpkins, if caught late in the evening, could be induced to run the stakes up without the slightest difficulty. Dandy expected that he would have the two hundred pounds back again within a week. Whether Marsden and O'Flanagan would have their share of it was quite another matter. He whistled softly and contentedly as he strolled along the deck, back to the secluded region of the first saloon. He decided to wait until Simpkins was in a bibulous condition before tackling him, and Simpkins accommodated him in that matter early in the evening. Dandy infused an air of brotherly love into his offer, and apologetically mentioned the odd fifty on the ground that that was "only business."

Jay rose to the bait like a hungry trout. He grasped Dandy's hand and shook it fervently.

"It's a kindness I shall never forget," he said; and Dandy Dick stifled a little smile.

The purser, rather weary of being bothered by Jay, had no alternative than to agree to the arrangement, and he undertook to hand Dandy £250 out of Jay's capital, at Southampton. He had seen clearly enough that Mr. Simpkins was a probable loser of the money he was drawing, but after all, he reflected, an ocean-going ship is not a kindergarten. If Mr. Simpkins chose to devise means of getting rid of his money after carefully making arrangements to guard against such a possibility, that was his affair.

But Dandy Dick and his fellow

conspirators blundered in thinking Jay Simpkins was altogether a fool. They had reckoned on his alcoholic folly making him dead easy to deal with. Jay, however, turned over the best part of a new leaf. In a confidential chat with Dandy Dick, he explained that the possession of a large sum of money such as he had in his pocket was a serious responsibility.

"Naturally," agreed Dick, somewhat icily, as he could not very well appear to take any other view; and he said several things that were far from polite under his breath when Jay sat down to poker the next evening with a large glass of lemonade in front of him. The other players consisted of the three conspirators. Marsden was nearly as skilful a rogue at cards as Dandy Dick. The pair of them, working together, might have been able to handle the situation to their own satisfaction. The weak spot was Peter O'Flanagan who, as a highly interested party, had insisted on taking a hand.

The stakes started low, as the trio had arranged. Jay's almost boyish face flushed with excitement until he detected O'Flanagan, with elephantine clumsiness, endeavouring to cheat. Dandy kicked the pugilist under the table, but it was too late. Jay rose to his feet with an expression of cold scorn.

"Gentlemen," he said proudly, "I hate scenes. Perhaps the best thing we can do is to cease playing and say no more about it." His blue eyes were fixed straight on the unhappy O'Flanagan, who blinked and blinked. The pugilist could have given Mr. Simpkins a knock-out blow at that instant with the utmost pleasure, but adroit words were beyond him.

"Whatcher mean?" he demanded, furious at having been found out.

"It isn't worth discussing," said Jay quietly. "Come, Erridge."

As Dandy passed, he caught O'Flanagan skilfully on the shin with his boot toe and the pugilist stifled a startled yelp.

"It is the sort of thing we might have expected," said Jay to Dandy as they returned to the first saloon. "My old man is a wise old bird, and he always says you should not play cards on board ship as you never know what kind of crooks you may run up against."

"A most unpleasant incident," commented Dandy, though his meaning was not quite what it appeared to be. "Never mind, we will be able to make up a party among our own set."

"No," retorted Jay stubbornly. "After that I won't play again on the boat. It's a lesson. I might have lost pounds and pounds through that man cheating and never known how it was."

"Oh, rubbish!" Dandy spoke in his most reassuring tones. "We shall be all right among first-class passengers."

"Look here," said Jay, heading for the smoke-room, where alcoholic consolation was to be bought, "you have been jolly good to me, Erridge, and I am everlastingly grateful, but my mind is made up. I simply won't touch another card on this ship."

Dandy hoped to persuade him to change his mind, and accordingly nursed him for the rest of the evening; but under the influence of much

whiskey, Jay grew more indignant and vowed he would never speak to another second-class passenger again.

Late that night, there was a slight disturbance in Peter O'Flanagan's cabin. Both Dandy Dick and Tod Marsden knew enough about their fists to make them formidable opponents, and between the two of them, even O'Flanagan had a fairly thin time. Moreover, he was in the peculiar position of not being able to call for assistance because he knew he deserved all he was getting. He was unable to make a public appearance on deck for several days afterwards, owing to the discoloration round both his eyes.

Much to the chagrin of Dandy Dick Erridge, Jay adhered with pig-like obstinacy to his resolution, soaking steadily instead of playing cards. The three conspirators were dismal men during the last few days of the ship's run, and as they drew near Southampton, Marsden and O'Flanagan clung to Dandy closer than a brother whenever he crossed the second-saloon barrier.

"It's almost time you saw the purser, isn't it?" Marsden said to him as the ship sidled past the Isle of Wight.

"Yes; I'll go and draw that money," agreed Dandy airily.

He sought out Mr. Simpkins, and they went to the purser together.

"You haven't done so badly," said that official, as he handed £250 in crackling notes to Erridge.

Dandy might have said several things, but he had his brain fully occupied with other matters and he walked aft again silently. O'Flanagan and Marsden awaited him hungrily and a trifle uneasily.

"The purser is too busy to attend to us at present," he said. "He asked me to see him again in about an hour. Meanwhile, I had better go to my cabin and finish packing up."

"Don't be late," Marsden called after him, with just a trace of anxiety in his voice.

"All right," Dandy said, over his shoulder. O'Flanagan blinked hard, which was a certain sign that he was puzzled. Tod Marsden felt that the money was fairly safe, but all the same, he would have liked to feel it in his hand.

The liner drew up to the quay. The barrier between first and second passengers was removed as if by common consent. Eagerly, Marsden and his pugilistic friend walked up the deck in search of Dandy.

At that instant, a small patrol launch happened to be passing the side of the now stationary liner. With an artistic display of clumsiness, Dandy fell over just under the bows of the launch.

"Good thing we happened to be passing," said someone on the little craft as he was picked up. "We can put you ashore at this landing place if you like."

"Anywhere will suit me," said Dandy, with an uneasy look over his shoulder. So far, his disappearance did not seem to have caused a commotion on the liner. "I'm awfully grateful," he added.

A minute later, he had scrambled to the quay and made his way past the customs officials out into the town.

"Two-fifty, lifted as easy as wink-

ing," he said cheerfully to himself. "I'd stand a ducking every day in the year at the same price."

Mr. Erridge's sudden exit from the liner was not unnoticed. There was a shout of "man overboard," while his heels were sticking out of the water, but the excitement subsided when the launch picked him up. Everybody was in a hurry to get ashore, and the incident was soon forgotten—by all but two men. They had hunted everywhere for Dandy, and then in despair, questioned Jay. He looked surprised, but explained that Mr. Erridge had been paid. Off they went again, searching feverishly, until someone told them of Dandy's mishap.

O'Flanagan dropped into a deck chair and pulled out a great colored handkerchief, with which he proceeded to mop his brow. Tod Marsden scowled angrily.

"Look here, Peter," he said jerkily, "he's given us the clean slip, but we'll find him."

The pugilist extended a mighty fist and they shook hands on it.

They were the two first men off the liner, and they scoured the deck like wolves. They examined every train with venom in their hearts, but after an hour, they began to fear the worst. They were a sad couple, when at length they regretfully left the quay, for they had only a few shillings between them.

The following night, after a fruitless search for work, they sat lugubriously at a quiet bar. O'Flanagan was clenching and unclenching his paws. Marsden was glancing through an evening paper lethargically.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright. An inarticulate noise came from his throat, and he pushed the sheet into his fellow-sufferer's hands.

"Read—read that!" he said huskily, pointing to a paragraph with a large head-line.

The pugilist awoke from his dream of vengeance and blinked at the paper. Then he read:

FORGED BANK NOTES

PASSENGER SAYS HE WAS DUPED.

A man giving the name of Richard Erridge was remanded at Southampton today, on the charge of being in possession of forged Bank of England notes for £250. The prisoner, who was arrested after endeavouring to cash one of the notes at a hotel, stated that he received the spurious notes on board ship in payment of a debt. He was remanded for inquiries.

"Forged!" ejaculated O'Flanagan. It took some time for the whole situation to filter through to his brain.

"Yes," commented Marsden bitterly. "That's our only consolation."

At identically the same moment, the Royal Mail Boat, Manora, was casting off from the dock at Liverpool for her long trip to Australia. In the smoke-room reclined the figure of Jay Simpkins, who was rapidly finding oblivion in intemperance. He had just received a receipt from the purser of that ship for a bundle of bank notes not unlike those in possession of the Southampton Police. His face wore a lovely smile.

"Three dirty crooks," he muttered. "And fancy trying it on me, too!"

The Invention That Got Across

BY JOSHUA JORDAN

This is a story of a burglar alarm that didn't work, and of a bright youth whose brain was working all the time.

CRASH! Thump! Bang!

Hugh Thomas sprang from his couch in the mill office, startled by the sound of breaking glass and the thud as of some heavy, falling object thumping to the floor out in the engine room. He reached for the electric light button and turned it. But all remained dark. He snapped it again impatiently, trembling with excitement. Evidently the "juice" was off. He jumped to the telephone, listened a moment, and then jammed back the receiver. That was "dead" too!

He stopped and listened, the while feeling nervously for his revolver in his hip pocket. All was silent out in the dark mill. Perhaps he had been dreaming. Yet why were the wires "dead"? Such a state of affairs indicated an intended safe-cracking. And yet, how could anyone enter without setting off the burglar alarm?

That burglar alarm was his employer's pet patent. Surely no ordinary cracksman could get by the protecting network of wires connected with every door and window. Had any thief broken in, Thomas reasoned, he must surely have set off the great gong which was calculated to rouse the neighborhood, and incidentally, advertise the efficacies of the famous "Benson Burglar Barricade" to all within hearing distance. Despite this reasoning, however, Thomas was almost certain that he heard, just then, a noise that sounded suspiciously like footsteps approaching.

Clutching his revolver nervously and keeping his eyes fixed in the direction of the door into the engine room, Thomas kneeled and groped about for his electric flash-lamp which he had laid beside the couch. His trembling fingers felt about on the floor and fell presently upon the object of their search. He grasped the lamp and accidentally pressed the button in such a way as to flood himself with light, just as the door squeaked open, followed instantly by the rough challenge:

"Drop that gun!"

Hugh Thomas was caught off his guard. A light was flashed upon him from an unseen hand, revealing the faint gleam of two revolvers leveled straight at him. Acting upon the principle that "the better part of valor is discretion," Thomas let the revolver slip from his almost lifeless fingers to the floor.

"Stand up!" again came the gruff voice from behind the light."

Thomas obeyed.

"Now open the safe and be quick about it; and don't you peep or we'll

have to use our patent silencer on you."

"I—I don't know the combination."

"The hell you don't!"

"No, sir; that's the truth. I'm just the night watchman," said Thomas, more self-contained as he moved toward the window. He reached out his hand as if to lean against the wall, at the same time trying slyly to touch a hidden device that would set off the burglar gong.

There was a quick movement and the next instant Hugh Thomas lay unconscious on the floor.

When he came to, the first thing ne was conscious of was a burning sensation in the back of his head, where he had evidently been slugged with a blackjack. He tried to move but found he was bound in a half-standing, half-squatting position with his back to a post. Nor could he utter a cry, had he felt moved to call down further brutal punishment upon himself, for in his mouth was stuffed a dirty rag that almost choked him. His hands were bound behind him. Twist as he would, he could not pull them free, and they were cold and numb from the tight binding cords.

As his eyes became more accustomed to the semi-darkness, he realized that he was in the engine room not far from the boilers. The intruders had opened the lower door of the firebox, evidently with a view to making the workshop they had chosen for the night, as warm and comfortable as possible. Through the furnace door came a glow from the bright coals within, which had been enlivened by the open draft. This light revealed the manner in which the "Benson Burglar Barricade" had been circumvented. A long ladder extended from the lofty skylight to the floor. Hiram Benson, with all his cleverness, had never thought to wire the skylight.

So the cracksmen had a clear field before them and a rich haul in prospect, for the next day was payday, and Thomas knew there must be a large sum of money in the safe.

Meanwhile, the sound of drilling and of low voices came from the direction of the office. The cracksmen would soon have stripped Hiram Benson's coffers bare and left him—Hugh Thomas—bound to a post, a miserable failure as a watchman as well as in all else he had ever attempted.

Hugh Thomas had first taken the job of watchman because he had wanted to become associated with Hiram Benson, the inventor, who had made a name and no mean fortune for himself as the manufacturer of household appliances and novelties, specializing upon the "Benson Burglar Barricade." Thomas, ever since he was a small lad, had always been a tinkerer about the town. If any little thing needed mending, Hugh Thomas usually had ingenuity enough to find some way of fixing it, and, as a result, his little workshop was often quite a busy place.

There is little outlook in life nowadays, however, for such a Jack-of-all-trades, and young Thomas really was ambitious, though he impressed most of his townspeople as being merely a lazy tinkerer. What Thomas lacked was an aggressive pioneer spirit to lead him away from his small

town into larger fields of opportunity.

He had attended the High School in the neighboring city for a couple of years, but had so neglected all but his work in the laboratory, where he would have preferred to spend all his time, that he failed to pass at the end of his sophomore year. He accordingly quit school and set up a small experimental laboratory in his workshop.

When Hiram Benson, the inventor, chose the little town as a site for his small novelty factory, Hugh Thomas had felt that surely opportunity had come thumping at his very door. So he went and told the maker of the "Burglar Barricade" that he had always wanted to be an inventor and that he would like a job with him to learn the trade. Benson laughed at Hugh's ingenuousness, told him that inventors were born and not made, and that the only job vacant was that of night watchman. Thinking such a position might serve as an entering wedge, Thomas eagerly accepted.

Several times since then he had anxiously handed in drawings and even crude models of devices he hoped Benson might deem worthy of including among his patented products. But invariably, the old inventor would hand them back, and running his fingers meditatively through his long grey locks, would explain as kindly as he could that, while the devices showed great cleverness, he feared there was not sufficient demand for that sort of thing to "get them across" to the public. "But keep at it, young fellow," he would add, "and you'll 'put over' a great invention some day. Just wait till I have an opening and I'll give you a job in our mechanical department."

So Thomas continued to hold the position of night watchman,—which was utterly distasteful to him,—partly because he felt it was a step to closer association with Hiram Benson, and partly because it left him several hours through the day to spend in his workshop. And here he was now, a failure as a night watchman, bound helpless to a post while cracksmen were preparing to blow up his employer's safe.

If the robbery would not ruin Benson, it would certainly ruin Thomas's chances of improving what he had considered his God-sent opportunity. He felt as despondent as a youth can feel when he concludes that he is nothing but an ambitious mediocrity.

True, he had not been hired to guard the factory against thieves. The "Benson Burglar Barricade" was guaranteed to do that. Benson had hired him because he needed someone to sweep out the plant at night, when it was empty, and also because the presence of a watchman made it possible for him to get lower fire insurance rates.

Nevertheless, Thomas knew that he should have had sense enough, when he heard the noise in the engine room, to jump to the outside door and call for help. Oh, why was he such a numbskull?

How could he face the two hundred workmen, for whom there would be no payroll tomorrow? How could he face Benson who had trusted him? How could he face his own people who were already bitterly disappointed at his failure to prove that he had

some prospects in life, and, finally, how could he look into the eyes of the pretty little maiden who had been forbidden to "keep company" with him for the very reason that he had not the aforesaid "prospects"?

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Hugh Thomas became fully determined that, if he ever escaped from his present predicament alive, he would go far away and never show his face in town again until he had found his road to fortune.

Thus despondently musing, he cast his eyes again in the direction of the boilers. The red glow from the lower door made the objects about him quite visible. His eyes fell upon the whistle cord, the ring on its lower end caught over a nail. If he could only get free and wind that cord about the nail, leaving the whistle valve open! He could then escape through the skylight and pull the ladder up after him. The whistle would awaken the town and frighten the yeggmen away, if it did not result in their capture. But such "if-ing" was like dreaming of what he would do *if* he had a million dollars.

He commenced tugging at the ropes, and as he pulled and twisted, he scratched his wrist on something sharp. It was a nail on the post behind him. If it could cut his skin, why not the cords about his wrist? A thrill of hope surged through him.

Frantically, he rubbed the coils about his wrists back and forth along the edge of the iron nail in saw-like motion. Soon he felt the fibres giving way. In a few moments his hands were free and the hot blood flowing into his fingers set them all a-tingle. He removed the gag from his mouth, put it in his pocket and spat profusely. Then he felt for his knife, but found that his captors had taken the precaution to relieve him of that. He felt for the knots that secured the ropes and discovered, to his dismay, that they were tied behind the post beyond his reach. Knowing that he had no time to spare, he began trying to slip down the ropes that bound his shoulders, at the same time straining to extricate his feet. The slow progress he made convinced him that, before he could get free, the cracksmen would have robbed the mill and escaped.

As he squirmed and tugged, his shin came in contact with a metallic object standing beside the post to which he was bound. He looked down and saw the outline of a fire extinguisher gleaming dimly in the glow from the furnace door.

"Huh!" he grunted, and continued his contortions, trying in vain to reach with his teeth, the ropes the bound his shoulders and bite apart the fibers. At the same time, his knee hit against the short rubber tube dangling from the extinguisher. That touch suddenly calmed him and he stood plunged in thought. Again his eyes traversed the half-light to the whistle rope. He was thinking of the times he nad amused himself, when sprinkling the lawn with a garden hose, by directing the stream upon his mother's sagging clothesline to see it rapidly shrink into a horizontal position.

He noticed that the whistle cord was apparently made of clothesline material and that, as it lay hooked over the nail on a post not ten feet

away, it was drawn almost taut. He found that in his half squatting position he could just reach the top of the extinguisher. He seized it eagerly, turned it upside down to start the flow of the contents, and then, hugging the container in his left arm, he grasped the squirting, squirming nozzle with his right hand. In a moment, Thomas had the fluid stream directed full upon the whistle cord, playing along its entire length. It made considerable noise, especially as the fluid fell hissing upon the hot boilers. He feared the cracksmen might hear him, but they were evidently too busily engaged to take notice.

At length, the charge was exhausted, and Thomas set the empty extinguisher down and waited. The whistle cord was well soaked, and as near as Thomas could detect, it had shrunk quite taut. Still, all was silent except for the catlike movements in the nearby office.

Suddenly, the building shook, and Thomas jumped in his binding coils as a muffled explosion sent a shock through his being. His heart sank only to bound again the next instant, as his waiting ears caught the hissing of steam and then a shriek of the mill whistle, growing in volume with every second. The cord had indeed shrunk enough to pull open the whistle valve!

There was a scampering, a flood of oaths, and a flashing of lamps, as the door from the office was burst open. Thomas hastily thrust the rag back into his mouth, sank limp in his ropes, put his hands behind him and closed his eyes. One of the cracksmen directed his lamp upon Thomas, shook him and felt the ropes.

"He ain't guilty," said the yegg, in a low, awed tone. "See! see! she's blowin' and no hand pullin' the rope! It's possessed! It's beat it for mine."

"Possessed nothin'!" retorted the other cynically. "Didn't I say we couldn't pull anything off in this joint. The burglar alarm was on the safe, of course. The blowup set off the whistle. Guess we'd better say 'Good-Night'!"

They stealthily retraced their footsteps and then, almost immediately, Thomas heard the outside door slam.

A great crowd collected as the whistle continued to shriek. Thomas was cut loose, and soon the story of the shrunken rope that saved the day—and the payroll—when the "Benson Burglar Barricade" failed, was the sensation of the town. And none was more tickled than old Benson himself.

He did not seem so much concerned because the crooks had been frightened away just as they were about to break through the inner doors of his safe, as because his young night watchman had staged a neat demonstration of Yankee ingenuity.

Accordingly, when the excitement had died down somewhat, Hiram Benson led Thomas to one side, and running his fingers through his long gray hair—as was his habit when talking—he said somewhat gruffly:

"Well, Thomas, I guess I won't need you as a night watchman any longer."

"I know I have been a rotten failure," replied Thomas dejectedly. "I don't blame you. I'm going to quit

town tomorrow, for good."

"Oh, no, you're not, either," Benson contradicted. "You're a failure as a watchman but a success as an inventor. I'm going to give you a good salary and put you in the experimental room. If you make good, some day I'll have my letter heads changed to "Benson & Thomas, Inventors.' "

"Do you really mean it, sir?" he gasped.

"Sure, I mean it. When a fellow in my shop gets out something that beats the Benson Burglar Barricade, he deserves some recognition, doesn't he?"

Thomas stared straight ahead of him, but could say nothing. He was thinking just then of a certain young person with flaxen hair and mild blue eyes, who, he was sure, would be glad to hear that at last, Hugh Thomas, had real "prospects."

"You see," Benson continued with smiles in his voice, "that was an invention that literally 'got across'!"

Luke McLuke Says

BY J. SYME HASTINGS

When Paw comes home an hour late for supper, and grins at the kids, and gives each of them a nickle, Maw goes upstairs and tries to think up synonyms for "souse" so she can tell Paw a few things.

When you pass a girl who has about $10 worth of perfume splashed on her clothes, you are always reminded of the fact that soap costs five cents per cake.

It is hard to make a girl believe that ten cents worth of sassafras tea will give her a better complexion than ten dollars worth of paint.

Nearly every man you see carries a dollar umbrella. But you never heard of a man losing an umbrella that cost less than five dollars.

We all respect gray hairs until we find one in the butter.

Any old mutt will do for a husband. But a girl has to use a lot of care when she is selecting a hat.

The marriage tie never includes her tongue.

A girl won't mind it much if you tell her she is getting tuberculosis. But for the love of Mike, don't tell her that she is getting fat.

Most women are good to look at. But so are most canteloupes.

When a woman wants material for a lecture she explores her husband's pockets.

There never was a fat woman who didn't believe that all scale makers were crooks.

All things come to those who go after them.

It takes most men a long time to learn that it is harder to borrow a dollar than it is to earn one.

A woman can hide freckles and wrinkles, but the burnt sienna on her elbows is there to stay.

Any old mutt will do for a husband. But a girl has to use a lot of care when she is selecting a hat.

When a married man spends more time with the woman he loves than he does at his office, his wife never knows anything about it.

Opposites attract. That's why a beardless youth sometimes cops out a girl with a respectable looking mustache.

There was a time when the see-more skirt and the sunny day were coupled in the betting. But the girls are wearing such thin stuff that you can see through them on a dark night.

The reason a girl doesn't have to have her ears punctured so she can wear jewelry nowadays is because it is perfectly proper to wear her watch where her garters used to be.

Why all this fuss over eugenics? As long as the girls wear transparent skirts and no corsets a man can tell what he is getting without having a state official make a report after an examination.

The reason why "friend husband" can't understand why "friend wife" goes around the house wearing a thin kimono that he can see through is because he will spend a half hour on a sunnny corner trying to see through what other men's wives are wearing.

Skeleton Gully's Gold

BY RAYMOND LEE HILL

Two stake workers with an old family feud between them, find it hard to kill one another when it is to their material advantage as well as a sop to their ideas of honor to finish one another.

GRAY and gloomy and ghost-like, the Dirty Devil Trail groped a zigzag descent through the mountain fog. Sometimes it melted around rugged rocks, blurred beneath beetling walls that faded into phantom cliffs above, became nebulous along narrow ledges shadowed with shrubbery, and dissolved under damp, dim crags over some fantastic precipice, which vanished into the haze, hiding the canyon far, far below.

"I must kill him!" mused Hardin sullenly, his lean face filled with fanatical fierceness. "When we come to Skeleton Gully, I must kill him!"

Rogan, with his florid face and cheerful blue eyes, rode ahead on his wiry roan horse, whistling gayly, as only those adventurers can whistle whose souls are eternally young. There was about his broad shoulders and red head, a certain swagger of rashness, roguery, and conceit, that Hardin marked with a mixture of admiration and envy; and he thought of the days they had been happy together in the gully, till it made him heartsick.

"We ought to make the mine by sundown," called back Rogan gayly. "Say, son, there's gold enough in that streak in Skeleton Gully to crack the world wide open fer you and me. Take a bird's-eye squint of the things we can buy—hosses and houses and grub fit to tickle a king," and he whistled merrily once more.

Hardin sat in his saddle in a slouching style, his thin lips set in a severe and sulky silence that concealed the turmoil of emotion in his soul. "I could kill Dave now," he brooded, with cool calculation. "He would fall down the cliffs into Canteen Creek Canyon. Reckon it wouldn't be square, though. I must give him his chance—he gave Joe that—I'll tell him. Then he'll have to look out for himself—when we git down to the gully's end."

"You won't say nary a word, son," chuckled Rogan, "but you love gold as much as your old pard. I want it to spend though, and you to save, you glum old hound."

Hardin made no answer. He seemed to sink deeper into despondency. The gravel and rocks rattled beneath the hoofs of the two horses and the two burros, which picked their way cautiously under ghost-cliffs.

Rogan hummed. Not all that gray, gloomy unreality of faint pine-tree tasseled pinnacles, mist-veiled crags with domes and turrets and

balconies, like goblin castles, and great gapping gorges filled with churning fog, in which objects emerged and faded, and floated fantastically, could affect the red-headed rider's spirits.

"We won't have to starve, and sweat, and swear, and dig like dogs much longer, Bill," called back Rogan, with a gay guffaw that made the rocks ring. "You're rich, pard. You're going to live. No more stinginess, son."

"It's got to be a part of my nature, Dave," grunted Hardin. "I was raised in the Cumberlands. We was pore. God Almighty, we was pore! We kids was glad to git a hunk of corn bread; and I've gone hungry to sleep many's the time, Dave."

"Well, that's all past, pard; we're rich. Say, she's getting powerful creepy along here, son. With these rocks wet and slickery, a fellar might slide overboard some ledge and land about a thousand feet below. But you always take care, you cautious old owl. Reckon I'm pretty reckless, but I'm not afraid."

"You're a brave man, Dave."

"I've never run from trouble or danger in my life," boasted Rogan proudly; "I'd rather die than run. I may be a danged fool; it'll cause me to cash in some day. Say, wake up, Bill! Yore face looks darker than the fog. What's wrong? What are you moping about?"

"I was thinking of the Cumberlands," curtly. "Our section was a pore country, almighty pore, and dangerous, too, for me and my folks."

"Don't see what there was to scare you in them play-house mountains, son."

"Feuds," grunted Hardin harshly.

At midday, the two men dismounted for dinner. After they had eaten, Hardin sat down on a flat stone and leaned back against the damp limestone wall, watching the mist in the chasm below the ledge, a few yards away. On his right, a short distance up the trail, Rogan sat humped up on a huge boulder, his bow-legs crossed. He took a short-stemmed, black-bowled pipe from his pocket and looked at it in a pleased fashion. Soon he was running on with his cheerful talk and puffing contentedly, while the smoke melted into the vague background of rugged rocks.

"Say, son, I've heered a bit about them mountain feuds," said Rogan, his round face showing its good humor through the wreaths of tobacco smoke. What's the idee, though? I never quite made it out."

"You kill one of my folks and I kill one of yours. It's a man for a man, Dave. It might be the mountain law, and it might be revenge, and it might be to save gitting potted yourself—I don't just know which, Dave; but I do know it's a life for a life."

Dave whistled.

"Two year ago, in Cheyenne Charley's Bar at Golden City, there was a poker game," said Hardin, with a certain dogged resolution in his homely brown face; "it wound up with a row. A feller named Dugan killed another; he warn't much more than a boy. He said his name was Holliday."

Dave took his pipe from his mouth. His lower jaw fell, showing his tobacco-stained teeth. In a flash, all the happiness in his ruddy face had changed to an expression of mingled wonder and defiance.

"Dugan 'lowed he stole an ace," explained Hardin, bitterly.

"And they shot nigh together?" followed up Rogan, with a grim challenge in his voice. "And Holliday dropped with his face in the spittoon box by the table, eh? When they rolled him over, he was a goner, with blood on his blue flannel shirt and a daub of tobacco juice on his forehead close to a scar like a half moon."

"I hit him when we was kids in the Cumberlands."

"You?"

"His real name was 'Hardin,' Dave."

"Hardin?"

"He was my kid brother!"

Suddenly Rogan stood up, one red hand clenching the short blackened stem of his pipe. His face was filled with a strong man's anguish. "I wish to God," he cried passionately, "I had never seen Cheyenne Charley's Bar, Bill!"

Hardin gazed gloomily down the yawning abyss, where the mist was becoming thin as fleece in places, and at others, breaking into huge feathery masses.

"How long have you knowed it, Bill?"

"Since last night. I overheard you talking to that prospector in Pinney Pass. He called you 'Dugan,' and then I knew."

"We've been pards fer six months, Bill." Rogan mechanically knocked the ashes from his pipe, upon the boulder. "We've fought side by side in Slickam's saloon and other places. We've played poker together, ate our grub together, and worn each other's clothes. Now we've struck a mint in Skeleton Gully. How's this going to wind up, Bill?"

"You killed Joe," with sullen relentlessness. "There's blood between us, Dave."

"I'd give up my half of the claim in the gully or ten years of life, Bill, if I could take away that night in Cheyenne Charley's. But it's too late. The thing's did. I ain't got no excuses to make. We had a dispute. I was quickest with the gun, Bill. He dropped. Of course I didn't know you then, and I've never even thought you was his brother. That happened in Arizona. When I came to Colorado, I took a new name. I fergot that racket. I met up with you. We got to be friends. I've thought a heap of you, son. Now has this got to end like a feud in your mountains at home?"

"I've thought about it all last night and all to-day, Dave"—Hardin leaned forward, his face hidden in his brown hands—"I've banked on you, thought more of you than anybody I know. You was always whistling and talking, and raising the devil; I was quiet and grumpy. But I often grinned to myself, Dave, when you got off some of your funny yarns; and I liked you a lot—yes, an almighty lot, Dave."

The latter kept tapping his pipe bowl on the boulder.

"I might have potted you all the way down the trail," went on Hardin, in a monotonous tone. "But I just

couldn't. I reckon Joe got his chance. All night I was mixed up about this. Now it's clear, and I'm telling you—giving my warning."

"Then it's me or you, Bill?"

"It's me or you. We'll divide things at the canyon end of the gully. You go one way. I'll go the other. When we meet—"

"Who'll get the claim, Bill?" and in Dave's blue eyes shone an unquenchable gleam of greediness.

"A dead man's got no use for a claim," laconically.

"I see. You figger neither of us won't give up that fortune in the gully? If one don't run away, somebody's got to die. But there won't be no fighting yet—not till after we part at Skeleton Gully's end?"

Bill nodded.

Just then the bowl of Dave's pipe slipped off the stem. It rattled on the rocks and went rolling down the slope toward the canyon edge. Dave started after it. He slipped and fell heavily.

Suddenly the earth and gravel that encrusted the slant, loosened and started to slide. Hardin scrambled forward and grabbed at Dave's boot. The heel slipped through his wiry fingers. Dave shot down, headfirst. He clutched at some shrubbery on the ledge over the chasm. It came up by the roots. The unfortunate man plunged down into the fog.

"Almighty God!" groaned Hardin.

Sickened with horror, he looped his lariat around the huge boulder on which Dave had sat. Then he slowly and cautiously lowered himself down the slope. Once he set in motion a miniature avalanche of earth and gravel, but at length he came to the ledge, which was about two feet wide. There he lay on his belly, clutching the rope firmly, and peered down into the mist below him.

The precipice fell straight for about eight feet, to a jutting shelf with a fringe of tough shrubbery, where Dave was clinging. He was looking up, his usually florid face looming ghastly through the fog, and a meek, dog-like appeal was in his wide-open blue eyes.

Hardin knew the man could hang there only a little while. Few travelers went over the Dirty Devil Trail. After a time Dave must drop into the creek that wound like an artery through the stony breast of the canyon.

A temptation came to Hardin: if he went away, Dave would be killed; the blood between them would be wiped out; and the mine in the gully would belong to him. Then he felt ashamed of himself. Dave had been his friend; he must give him a chance, just as Joe had had his. He remembered his brother's thin, weak face, shifting eyes, cynical shoulder shrug, and endless cigarettes. Later, he would follow the code of the Cumberlands, but at present he could not see even his brother's slayer die a death like this.

"Hold hard, Dave!" he called, "I'll let down the lariat!"

He dropped the end of the rope over the ledge on which he lay. It dangled in the fog, twisting round and round. Dave caught hold of it feverishly. He began to climb up, slowly, laboriously. It seemed to take an interminable time for him to come

within Hardin's reach. When he did, the latter reached down and caught him under one arm and helped him over the ledge. They rested here a little while, breathing hard, and then hauled themselves up to the rocky trail.

"You didn't let me die, Bill?' said Dave, as they sat on the limestone resting.

Hardin shook his head gloomily and gazed through the thinning mist.

"Then it's settled, Bill?"

"No," looking obstinate and sullen. "Because I helped you out of the canyon makes no difference. I would have done as much for a dog. There's still blood between us."

Down, down, down the Dirty Devil's winding way rode the two men, passing stupendous crags and skirting deep, dangerous chasms. In the evening, as the late sun was breaking up the fog, they reached the bottom of the canyon. They followed it west till they came to the opening of Skeleton Gully.

The miners divided the supplies in a business-like fashion. Dave took his own horse and the bigger of the two burros.

"Good-bye, Bill!" he said, holding out a thick hairy hand.

"Good-bye, Dave!" returned Hardin curtly, and then swung around and pretended to tighten his saddle girth. He heard leather creak as Dave climbed into his saddle. For once the latter rode away without his merry whistle. When the rattle of hoofs had faded fainter and fainter, till Hardin could hear it no longer, he leaned his hot face against the glossy neck of his bay horse and stood very still. After a time, the animal grew restless. He looked around several times, rubbed his master's arm with his velvet muzzle, and then began to crop some grass that grew among the rocks.

Hardin camped that night in the entrance of the gully. He was too troubled to sleep. Hour after hour, he studied the future with cool calculation, reasoning that Dave, even though he might give up the gold their claim promised, was too vain of his valor to run away. He would likely ride around to the south and enter Skeleton Gully, then advance warily from that direction toward the mine, expecting Hardin to proceed from the canyon end. They must meet somewhere along that winding defile, and one would inherit the claim.

The fog melted away with the night. Dawn brought a deluge of brilliant sunlight that turned the last lingering mists to pale peacock tints. Bill fried some bacon, then moodily munched a meagre breakfast. He thought in a cold, crafty, practical style, that occasionally shamed him a little, weighing Dave's daring recklessness against his lack of discretion and patience. He would make a dangerous enemy. Perhaps even now he was lying behind the rocks on the heights somewhere, ready to fire when Hardin exposed himself, so he must keep constantly on the alert. Rifle in hand, he crawled about among the boulders and shrubbery and watched, often pausing to listen intently. After about an hour, he decided Dave was not in the vicinity.

Hardin finally began to move up the gully toward the mine, which was

located three or four miles away. He advanced slowly, alert for danger. Now and then, he left the animals in the shrubbery and crawled ahead on his hands and knees to peer around a bend. Several times he fancied he heard a step, and twice a sudden unaccountable fear caused him to crouch back of the boulders and watch and listen for a long while.

Proceeding in this manner, he made such little progress that the shadows of the evening were lengthening when he arrived in view of the claim. Skeleton Gully swerved to the west here and ran into a ruddy sunset, against which, the mine looked lonesome and dreary.

He fancied he saw Dave behind some timbers. Suddenly a shot smacked the silence, and he dropped into the shrubbery and lay still.

"Dave missed me a mile," he thought, with a slow, satisfied smile. "'I didn't even hear the bullet."

The bloom paled and took on a bluish tone; dusk spread like a lavender shadow, deepening to a violet stain; the stars appeared till the sky above the gully walls resembled a purple polka-dot ribbon. Presently, the moon rose, full and yellow, flooding the world with an orange light. Hardin was too prosaic to be affected by the moonlight at ordinary times, but something about its greenish hue gave objects a spectral touch, and this, with the strain of suspense he had endured all that day and the previous night, unnerved him so much that he found breathing difficult, and felt his throat becoming dry and his hands shaking.

The anxiety made him keen to end the thing. He crawled with less caution than usual to some boulders on a rise overlooking the claim. From here he could see Dave lying behind a pile of timbers. He raised his rifle and took a long careful aim; his bony finger trembled on the trigger; then he dropped his gun and flung up his hands with a passionate gesture.

"Dave, Dave," he muttered huskily, "I can't do it! I can't do it!"

His former friend did not move. Hardin supposed he had been so worn out with watching and waiting that he had fallen asleep. Drawn by a strange fascination, Bill moved silently toward the man. He would awaken Dave and tell him there would be no feud. Upon reaching a stake driven into the ground about twenty feet from the timbers where his partner lay, he paused and picked up a paper impaled upon it. It contained a rude scrawl, which he read by the bright moonlight.

Pard:

"i had you covered twiced. unced from a cottonwood and agen from sum bolders half ways up the gully but i couldnt kill you. the roan and the buro or hitched up clos to snake cric they aint bin watered the roan is lame in the left hind leg. dont fergit yore old pard. When you find this their wont be no blod betwean us, and hears luck to you and the mine, and take care of yoreself, son.

Dave.

Hardin dropped the message, and running to his old friend's side, bent down and began to shake him.

"Dave, Dave!" he cried, "wake up! There ain't going to be no killing now. You take the mine and I'll go away. Why don't you wake up? *Almighty God! There's blood on his breast! He's shot hisself! He's dead!*"

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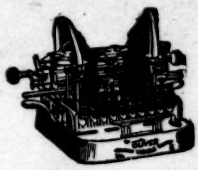

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